

# permanentrevolution

Issue 18 / Autumn 2010 / £2.50

## Britain: Austerity and anger



**INSIDE**

**Health service /**  
Business hovers over NHS

**Education /**  
The cost of free schools

**History /**  
Crushing Kronstadt

**Russia 1921 /**  
The fate of the revolution

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# From the editors

## Permanent Revolution 18

Autumn 2010

A quarterly review of revolutionary politics and theory

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Since the last issue of Permanent Revolution parts of Europe have seen mass opposition to the austerity programmes of the national governments; Greece has witnessed several protest general strikes and in France millions have poured onto the streets to defend their pension rights. We cover some of these developments in Briefings.

The UK has yet to see the same level of mass protest to cuts packages, but this autumn sees the unveiling of further details of the 25-40% cuts to welfare and services. The TUC Congress in September was a channel for the anger of millions, debating many resolutions and competing positions on how to resist the attacks. As our two articles on the reforms of the NHS and on schools show, unless these resolutions are turned into mass action the changes pushed through in both sectors will have a dramatic effect on the lives of millions.

We also continue the debate opened up in the last issue over the legacy of the Russian Revolution. The crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion in 1921 has long polarised opinion on the left – between the supporters of Bolshevism and those from the anarchist tradition. But here Bill Jefferies critically unpicks the justifications given by Lenin and Trotsky for their actions and finds them unconvincing.

In a reply to the article in our last issue on Lenin and Trotsky's culpability for facilitating the degeneration of the Russian Revolution by their ban on party factions, Stuart King argues the article exaggerated the degree of bureaucratism in 1921.

We close as always with our review section. Please get in touch and tell us what you think.

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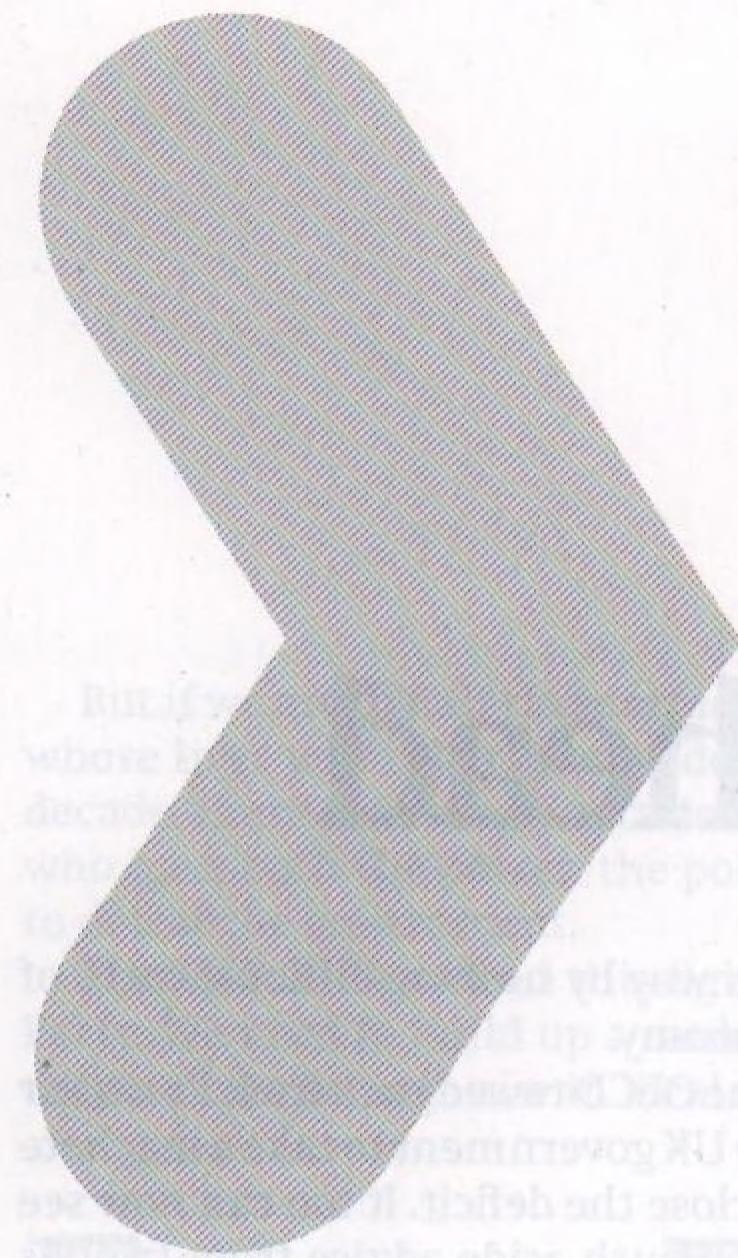
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# permanent revolution

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Stuart King replies to an article in the last issue by Mark Hoskisson which argued that the banning of factions inside the Russian Communist Party in 1921 was a decisive moment in the counter-revolution, removing all obstacles to the consolidation of bureaucratic power by Stalin. Here King argues there was still scope for a revival of party democracy after 1921 and the decisive struggles against Stalin lay ahead

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# A decisive contest lies ahead

In October the UK coalition government will announce the details of the Comprehensive Spending review which will indicate spending plans of the various government departments for the next five years. With spending on health and international development "protected", the other departments will be making cuts in the region of 25 to 30%, about £40 billion cuts per year.

Six consecutive years of spending cuts, will more than wipe out all the increases seen under Labour since 1997, and will hit the poorest hard. The first budget in June was a sign of how the cuts will fall, with regressive measures such as the increase in VAT and attacks on benefits being favoured over any increase in income or wealth tax or attacks on tax evasion.

The impact of this scale of cuts can be hard to envisage, but even without the detailed announcements we know that many people will see their incomes fall – the independent Institute of Fiscal Studies estimates that the poorest 10% will see their incomes cut by more than 2.5% over the next five years.

Benefits will be slashed, and people dependent on welfare including the elderly, the disabled, the sick and single parents will find their incomes reduced and the closure of many of the local services they depend on.

Women will be hardest hit, both as workers who lose jobs and have wages and conditions slashed – they make up 65% of the public sector workforce – and as those most dependent on key benefits. They have already been hit by cuts to the Health in Pregnancy Grant, the Sure Start Maternity Grant and Child Benefit.

Cuts in education will see an end to support for vulnerable children and an increase in class sizes. Capital and refurbishment programmes will almost disappear and public buildings, roads and infrastructure will degenerate.

Vince Cable has already signalled that spending on universities and research will be slashed. Arguing against this the influential Royal Society suggested that even a 20% cut would be "irreversibly catastrophic for the future of UK science and economic growth," and one university head warned, "many universities will not survive in their present form".

At the same time, the coalition is planning to take the opportunity to push forward major restructuring in the public sector, building on New Labour reforms but taking these to a qualitatively new level in the NHS, education and local government. They are aiming to remove the state from delivering any of these services, handing them all over to the private sector who can run them for profit and free from even the most minimal democratic control.

Since June Chancellor Osborne has been subject to a welter of criticism from within sections of the business class, academics, research bodies and pro-market journalists who are alarmed at the very real possibility that this scale of cuts will slump the economy just as an incipi-

ent recovery was under way by sucking billions worth of demand out of the economy.

In September even the OECD rowed back from its earlier advice in spring for the UK government to take a machete to public spending to close the deficit. It too can now see what lies ahead. So why push aside advice from friends and informed insiders? Because the leaders of the Con-Dem coalition are first and foremost ruling class politicians not academic economists.

Cameron knows he has a once-in-a-generation chance to reconfigure the balance of class forces by dealing a heavy blow to the bastions of working class organisation in the public sector, by dismantling whole parts of the welfare state. One thing is clear. If these cuts are allowed to go ahead then within the next decade Britain is going to be a very different place. For those who remember the Thatcher years (1979-90) it may be all too familiar with rapidly rising poverty, decrepit inner cities, massive youth unemployment and the consequent but hugely damaging rise in petty crime, violence and tension.

Under the Thatcher years the labour movement response to the attacks was very uneven. Key sectors including the miners struggled heroically but were left isolated and ultimately faced defeat. The public sector unions had many skirmishes and won a number of defensive struggles, but were never united in a frontal assault against the government.

This meant that they could not defend services and benefits for the class as a whole, failing the most vulnerable who were dependent on welfare and services. The anger and frustration of those without a voice who were systematically neglected and abused showed itself not in organised labour movement struggles but in sporadic riots.

This time round we have to demand more from the organised labour movement. But the signs are not promising. Although sections of workers are organising and balloting for action, including in the Post Office, Fire Brigade, BBC, Virgin Atlantic, British Airways, London Underground, various local authorities and hospitals and even Coca-Cola, the response of our "leaders" has been pitiful.

At the opening of the Trades Union Congress in September, general secretary, Brendan Barber, rather than issue a warning to the coalition of a massive workers' response, preferred to reassure them. "I don't go around talking about great waves of strikes and so on," he said. He did admit that there might be "some very difficult disputes in some areas", but seemed to have a rather limited view of his own role.

As one would expect RMT leader Bob Crow was more forthright, calling for co-ordinated action across all unions to throw back the government attacks. Absolutely correct, but it is also necessary to face up squarely to the fact that the law will be used by employers and government to try to outlaw and derail such action and that we must be prepared for defiance.

But if we are to halt these attacks, and to defend those whose lives will otherwise be devastated over the next decade, there needs to be a united response, led by those who have both the power, the politics and the interests to defeat the government.

The TUC will not lead this fight, nor will the Labour Party. We need to build up a rank and file movement in the workplaces, organise in local communities to create

a mass movement of strikes, demonstrations, occupations and civil disobedience to resist this assault.

The TUC should have already called for a massive day of industrial action on 20 October when Osborne takes to his feet in parliament and takes an axe to the public sector. It still should; but all trade unionists should be arguing for massive local action on the day to start the fightback we need.

## For an EU general strike!

The massive strikes and demonstrations in France on 7 September in defence of pension provisions were a magnificent response to the Sarkozy government's attacks and set the standard for mass militancy in Europe this autumn.

Upwards of 2.5 million struck and took to the streets, far more than the June demonstrations. Not enough maybe to make the government abandon its plans yet, but enough to encourage millions more that further massive action is possible and can succeed.

Europe is at the centre of the economic crisis which unfolded in 2008. Several countries of the old continent – both in the Mediterranean and in the East – are on the verge of bankruptcy.

In Greece, Spain and Portugal, the living standards of the working population are being massively reduced: through cuts in pensions, social spending, education and healthcare, as well as increases in consumption taxes. The ruling classes tell us that the Greek workers lived beyond their means – on an average net wage of 550 per month!

Even in the heartland of the EU, Germany – which in recent months has recorded growth through exports to the semi-colonial world – the biggest austerity package of the post-war period is being prepared; the same goes for the UK.

Using the crisis as a justification, the bourgeoisies want to achieve a strategic shift in the balance of power between the classes in each country by means of pay cuts, mass layoffs, a bonfire of welfare entitlements and the elimination of rights won by the workers' movement in the last decades.

The leaderships of the working class in Europe, the social democratic and Stalinist parties, as well as the trade unions, have done nothing to counter the attacks.

They want the costs of the crisis to be spread "fairly" – as if all classes were equally responsible for the crisis of capitalism.

The bureaucratic leaders of the trade unions promised to organise resistance, but their plans do not go beyond the symbolic plane. Thus, the European day of action on 29 September will only consist of small rallies and demonstrations in most of the 27 EU countries.

But the Brussels bureaucrats of the ETUC do not consider the possibility of a Europe-wide strike. In countries

where the pressure of the workers is at its most intense, such as in Spain or Greece, the trade unions have had to organise general strikes. As impressive as the six general strikes in Greece in the first half of 2010 were, they have not been enough to beat back the cuts.

In many countries it is the social democratic parties themselves that are carrying out the attacks in the interest of the bourgeoisie. But also newer, more left-wing reformist formations such as the Left Party in Germany or SYRIZA in Greece have no real alternative: they participate in the protests only to get a boost for their strategy of contesting elections and joining governments.

Even new projects which have declared themselves "anti-capitalist" have no strategy to end the crisis of the capitalist system by its revolutionary overthrow.

The Left Bloc (BE) from Portugal even went so far as to vote in parliament for the rescue package for the Greek state and the associated attacks on the working population of Greece – because there is supposedly "no alternative"!

But in the workplaces we see the first signs of a real alternative: workers have defended themselves against bearing the costs of the crisis. In the Philips TV factory in Dreux near Paris, the occupiers went so far as to resume production under workers' control.

The reformists cannot present a root and branch alternative to the cuts because there really is no other way to help capitalism out of its crisis except by having the working class pay for it, even if as the union leaders would have it, the bosses must pay their share too.

The only realistic perspective for a dignified future is to expropriate the capitalists, via the workers smashing the state and managing society through their own councils. This requires a generalisation of the strikes, workers' democracy in the struggles and consistent action against all cuts, layoffs and closures!

- Not a cent for the rescue of banks and corporations!
- A European-wide general strike to beat back the attacks by the capitalists and their governments!
- An end to precarious employment which dominates the lives of millions of workers (especially young workers) across Europe!
- A massive reduction in working hours with full pay, in order to distribute the available work to all shoulders!
- The occupation of companies which threaten dismissal or redundancies.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

## A bonfire of jobs and public services

**TWO APPOINTMENTS** to the coalition government's first cabinet signal beyond doubt that David Cameron's Tories are determined to finish the demolition of local government begun in the Thatcher years.

These incongruous figures, whose origins are as far removed from the playing fields of Eton and the champagne-fueled frolics of Oxford's Bullingdon Club as the Con-Dem coalition are from peace, love and justice. Michael Gove, the self-styled intellectual iconoclast, determined to put an end to comprehensive state education and Eric Pickles, the blunt Yorkshireman, who earned a reputation as a union-bashing privatiser during his time as Tory leader of Bradford council and later went on to champion the wholesale outsourcing of Essex County Council's services.

Gove at the revamped Department for Education and Pickles at the Department for Communities and Local Government look an unlikely double act, but there is no questioning the seriousness of their intent.

Within weeks of assuming his post, Gove made himself a favourite of sketch-writers and cartoonists with a series of bungled announcements of billions in cuts to Labour's Building Schools for the Future programme. He brazened out the criticism "apologising" for the cuts while not retreating an inch from them.

One London borough alone - Camden - has witnessed the cancellation of at least a dozen projects and the effective loss of some £170m. By the time of parliament's summer recess, Gove had steamrollered his Education Act through the Commons and Lords in record time, building on

New Labour's academies programme, to threaten the remaining vestiges of local authority influence over primary and secondary education in many parts of the country.

Pickles' most notable headline-grabbing move so far has been the relatively understated announcement of the abolition of the local government watchdog, the Audit Commission. At a local level, however, Pickles' co-thinkers in London boroughs such as Barnet, Croydon, Hammersmith & Fulham, and Westminster have been busy. Recent weeks have seen attacks on national agreements for pay supplements to cover anti-social hours (Croydon), merging education departments (Hammersmith & Fulham and Westminster) and threatening to implement a so-called "Easy Jet" model in Barnet, where the council would simply commission services from private companies and the voluntary sector,

prior to this year's election. By 22 June those directors dramatically revised their estimates - invariably upwards. Between now and financial year 2013-14 the coalition is likely to demand a minimum of £2bn and quite possibly more than £5bn in spending cuts from Greater London's 32 borough councils [see box].

The latter figure amounts to just under 25% of current expenditure by these local authorities. And the evidence compiled for the BBC as part of a study by credit ratings agency Experian of the differential impact of the cuts suggests that those inner London boroughs with the highest concentration of relative poverty will face the heaviest blows, with cuts projected to exceed roughly a third of all current spending.

With George Osborne due to unveil the details of the comprehensive spending review on 20 October, many local authority bosses have already announced unprecedented attacks on their workforces and service provision. The single largest jobs massacre has unfolded in Nottinghamshire County Council, where the council leader is the aptly named Kay Cutts and whose office wall features a large portrait of Margaret Thatcher.

**For local government workers faced with rising job insecurity, there is also the reality this year of a pay freeze, which amounts to a substantial real pay cut**

with charges being imposed on local residents for numerous "frills".

Even if New Labour had somehow retained control of 10 Downing Street after the general election, the writing was already on the wall for local authorities across Britain, with some 40,000 job losses first forecast in 2009.

Finance directors in dozens of councils had been making dire projections of budget gaps of tens of millions of pounds over the months

In this authority some 3,000 jobs are due for the chop along with a wide range of "non-statutory" services.

Elsewhere in the East Midlands, Lincolnshire County Council has threatened to eliminate some 1,400 posts, while bosses at Somerset County Council, one of the largest employers in the south west of England, has announced the loss of 1,500 jobs. In West Yorkshire's largest authority, Kirklees, centred around Huddersfield, management

## Threatened job losses across some London local authorities

Authority	Number of Jobs
Bexley	352
Camden	270
Harrow	300
Hammersmith & Fulham	659
Lambeth	344 (+93 in housing ALMO)
London Development Agency	49
City of Westminster	337

Sources: UNISON branch reports, replies to Freedom of Information requests and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Reports

had been poised to scrap 1,500 posts – more than 10% of its workforce in a single swing of the axe – at the same it was seeking to cap redundancy payments at the statutory maximum of £380 for each completed year of service.

For now, at least, the employer has beat something of a retreat in the face of the UNISON branch that represents more than 80% of the eligible workforce launching a ballot for an all-out strike.

The resistance offered by Kirklees' workforce has, unfortunately, been very much the exception to the rule thus far. Meanwhile, despite the good intentions of some Labour councillors and spirited anti-Tory rhetoric from others, no Labour-controlled authority has indicated that it will become a beacon of resistance to the Con-Dem offensive.

Keen on appearing as "radical and innovative" the recently elected Labour administrations in the London boroughs of Camden and Islington have agreed to look at sharing a chief executive and senior management. So far, so good, one might think, but the ultimate target seems to be hundreds of relatively low-paid, so-called backroom jobs, which would be sacrificed in the name of protecting "front line" service provision.

Given the staggering scale of job losses across local government, it will not be possible for managements to rely solely upon slicing section by section, department by department. This creates at least the possibility of action across whole councils and

possibly even regions. But full-time union officials will maintain that replicating the examples of workers in France, Greece and Spain in mounting generalised strikes would entail unlawful action!

Without a well-implanted organisation linking militants across employers and local authority unions, the short term prospects for co-ordinated action against the whole cuts offensive remains slim.

For local government workers faced with rising job insecurity, there is also the reality this year of a pay freeze, which amounts to a substantial real pay cut, conservatively estimated at between 3-5%, prior to the hike in

VAT from 17.5 to 20% in January 2011 and the prospect of a further two year freeze.

In addition, the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), the subject of unrelenting media attacks as a "gold-plated" retirement plan, is itself a medium-term target for the coalition. The Blairite former minister, John Hutton, is due to submit his recommendations for the "reform" of the LGPS and other public sector pension provision in late September.

It may be that, just as in 2006, an attack on the LGPS will prove a catalyst for national strike action. In the absence of such action, there are certainly possibilities for militant local campaigns, often led by community-based activists, to save particular services – a local library here, a primary school or luncheon club for older people there – can succeed in the short term.

But ultimately a serious campaign for repelling the fundamental assault on local services and welfare provision will require nationwide strikes on a scale never seen in the history of local authority trade unionism.

George Binette

## PUBLIC SECTOR FIGHTBACK

# Fighting the cuts: a coalition of resistance

IN EARLY August a number of figures on the left launched a call for a Coalition of Resistance (COR) against the Con-Dem coalition's attacks on public services.\* It included labour movement stalwarts like Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, Mark Serwotka, Bob Crow, Jeremy Dear and Paul Mackney, Green Party members and activists from the far left such as Lindsey German and John Rees.

COR quickly became a focus for trade unionists, community

organisations, anti-cuts groups and students wanting to organise against the cuts already being implemented up and down the country. Everyone knows that another wave, indeed a tidal wave, is coming after the spending review. Hundreds of people have signed up to the statement and emailed in to get involved.

COR is organising a national conference on 27 November with the aim of bringing anti-cuts activists together. A London open organising meeting in early



# Briefings

September attracted more than 170 people. The meeting was very positive, hearing from activists in local anti-cuts campaigns and encouraging contributions on how we could take the campaign forward. The SWP's Right to Work Campaign turned up but all too predictably only to invite the

## We need to work with Labour Party activists and left wing councillors who will stand up and fight and refuse to vote for cuts

audience to participate in various RTW events.

People well may ask "do we really need another united front campaign to fight the cuts?" After all we have the RTW, the NSSN, TUSC, and many of the names sponsoring COR are the same as sponsored these others. But activists know only too well the problems of the existing campaigns – they rapidly became the property of this or that far left group.

Local activists are expected to turn out to meetings or events organised by the SWP or Socialist Party via these fronts without having any democratic control over them. National leaderships are stitched up by block votes, chairs and meetings manipulated by them.

COR offers an alternative providing it commits itself to a democratic and non-sectarian way of operating. Speakers at the recent London meeting made clear the idea was not to centrally direct the anti-cuts struggle but to provide a forum for discussion and a co-ordination. This is realistic; the local anti-cuts campaigns are only just getting off the ground, feeling the way to how to organise themselves. Some come out of the local Trade Union Councils. Others, like Lambeth's Save Our Services, were initiated by important unions locally. Still others have been started by local activists fighting in defence of local community organisations.

At the moment what is needed is to share experiences, learn from each other's successes (and mistakes) and to provide a national (and regional) forum to discuss policy issues.

This came up at the London meeting – what is our alternative to making massive cuts in public

services, how do we argue we should deal with the debt problem? Is it a problem, whose debt is it and who should pay for it? If we want to win the political argument we need clear answers to these questions that go beyond just "No Cuts".

COR also needs to work with the left in the Labour Party. Local Labour Party leaders, often in

control of councils doing the cutting, are happy to join in the denunciations of Tory-Lib Dem cuts. They are happy to be put on platforms where they can spout left wing verbiage.

We need to work with Labour Party activists and left wing councillors who will stand up and fight – and there are many who will: those who refuse to vote for cuts, who argue against setting Tory-Lib Dem imposed budgets and who will join with us to build a movement that can protect such councils from attack. In mobilising the left in the Labour Party working with and alongside the LRC is vital.

Down the road we need a COR that is mass, democratic, and represents the anti-cuts committees in a delegate structure. And a coalition that can argue for a real alternative programme to that of the austerity and sackings offered by the Con-Dem coalition.

Stuart King

\*The initial statement can be found at: [gu.com/p/2tz6q](http://gu.com/p/2tz6q)

### LABOUR LEADERSHIP CONTEST

## Ditching the toxic brand but keeping the policies?

THE SUMMER months have seen the Labour Party leadership contest proceed in a mostly tedious manner. The unchanging hustings format, allied to the lack of substantial political differences, is responsible.

Diane Abbott, despite rightly describing the other candidates, as "four New Labour geeks in suits", failed to make the kind of impact that John McDonnell would undoubtedly have had on the contest.

Preferring to base herself on media appearances, rather than any serious engagement with the trade unions or those already fighting government cuts, Abbott ended up as a token candidate, never heading

a serious left wing challenge to New Labour.

Indeed, she went out of her way to not be identified as the candidate of the left. All of which should have made the left in the Labour Party, around the Labour Representation Committee, question the wisdom of delivering up the nominations she needed to be on the ballot paper.

What did the leadership election contest tell us about the shape of a post-Blair/Brown Labour Party and what form Labour opposition to the coalition is likely to take over the coming months and years?

The first thing to note is the extent to which the candidates felt the need to "break from the past" and leave the New Labour period

## Coalition of Resistance / National Conference

27 November 2010 10am-5pm

Camden Centre, Bidborough St, London WC1H 9D

Nearest tube: Kings Cross/St Pancras

[www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk](http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk)

behind. This was the mantra of all the candidates to a lesser or greater extent, revealing their belief that being identified with the New Labour brand was toxic and a vote loser.

Two examples underline this. During the Sky debate in early September, all the candidates were asked if they were socialists. All replied positively, but expressed this by means of some vacuous waffle along the lines of the need to "act together in society". Nevertheless it was instructive that the S word had made a comeback in the lexicon of modern Labour. Blair could barely bring himself to describe himself as a social democrat in his time as leader.

This distancing from New Labour as a brand was even present in the David Miliband campaign. From the outset he declared that he was "neither New nor Old Labour, but rather Next Labour". All of this indicates that on the back of electoral defeat New Labour is no longer an obligatory credo in the Labour Party, and that to forward your career you have to leave it behind.

Anyone viewing hustings meetings over the summer could see this process clearly. And the ditching of New Labour was not only true of long term activists, but was also true of the newer, younger activists who have joined and got involved since the general election wanting to oppose the coalition – as many as 20,000 over the summer some reports suggest.

All of that said, it's not the case that New Labour policies have been jibed. The central neo-liberal, pro-business outlook at the heart of New Labour remains intact.

We only have to look at the treatment of Ed Miliband to see the truth of this. During his campaign, he tried very hard to position himself to the left of his brother by making mild criticisms of the Blair/Brown period, most notably in discovering years after the event, that the Iraq war was a "mistake".

On economic matters he announced his support for a few small-scale reforms like the implementation of a living wage,

rather than the minimum wage. He also had the temerity to say that New Labour had been too close to the banks and big business. For these gross acts of betrayal, the full force of the old New Labour hierarchy has been directed against him. In particular, Blair and Mandelson have made it clear he should not have been supported at all. Blair states in his book, released to coincide with the start of voting for the next Labour leader, that "we should depart not even one millimetre from the path of New Labour".

Mandelson went further, saying Ed Miliband's victory would be a "disaster". And, via leak and rumour, it was reported in mid-September, that, in a private comment, David Cameron had warned that David Miliband would be the greatest threat to the coalition. Very convenient!

David Miliband is clearly the most Blairite of the candidates. His record in government confirmed that, particularly as foreign secretary. To become the next Labour Party leader however, he had to convince the Labour Party electorate that he was the best placed to win the next general election, not that you necessarily agreed with him on policy.

In the Labour Party the question of who can beat the Tories has usually been a decisive factor; it goes with the territory. At the time of writing it's not known which

factor has been decisive. It may have been that the New Labour brand was too toxic.

Whatever the case, we need to learn the lessons of the leadership election. There is no doubt that there has been a small revival in membership and activity within the Labour Party. It was noticeable how the leadership campaign did draw in newer, younger militants who can also be found in the anti-cuts campaigns. The anti-cuts movement in the coming months will not bypass the Labour Party nor should it. Socialists outside the Labour Party should relate to the anti-coalition mood of those inside it or joining it. For example, unity can be forged around the demand for opposition to, and non-implementation of, all cuts by Labour-controlled councils.

If that means joining or rejoining the Labour Party, we should – after all, the various get rich quick left electoral projects of the noughties failed. Is New Labour finished? As a brand, definitely, but not as a body of ideas based on attachment to capitalism, nor in the form of leaders prepared to "recreate its values in a modern setting" – to quote John Prescott out of context.

The fight against its politics will continue inside the unions and Labour Party as well as outside both. Revolutionary socialists should be part of that fight.

Andy Smith

### LGBT

## Hackney Pride – lesbians and gays bash back!

ON SATURDAY 4 September, around 1,000 people – lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, transgender, and queer – marched through the streets of Hackney to demand equality, respect and an end to violent attacks against our communities. This was Hackney Pride. In an era when there is

widespread belief that lesbians and gay men have largely won the struggle for equality, this might have caused some surprise, even to some within the gay community itself. We now have an equal age of consent, same-sex couples can have civil partnerships, and even most small and medium-sized towns now



have gay pubs and clubs to socialise within. There is even an out gay Tory cabinet minister! Why the need to march and demonstrate rather than simply celebrate?

For urban, metropolitan gays and lesbians with the required amount of spending power, being gay no longer positions you on the margins. You can be a gay Tory, spend your leisure time in gay clubs and gay gyms, go on gay holidays, party for the whole weekend of the annual Pride event, and seal yourself away

magazines like *Gay Times*, *Attitude* and *Diva* – has been mired in the ideology of consumerism and the pink pound. Seeking acceptance by society has meant accepting the social, ideological and cultural coordinates of capitalism.

Such complacency has taken a knock over the past few years with a series of high-profile violent assaults and murders. A survey by Stonewall published in 2008 found that 25% of gay men and lesbians in London had experienced

called Homophobia in E2.

In August 2008, a 20-year-old art student was stabbed eight times by a gang of homophobic youths whilst drinking outside a gay pub. He has been left paralysed from the neck down. A 15-year-old youth, Nazrul Islam, was sentenced to 10 years for his part in the assault. The youths appear to have come from the Bengali community across the border a few streets away in Tower Hamlets. It is not hard to see the dangers here.

In areas like East London, there is a growing sentiment amongst even relatively progressive lesbians and gay men that black and Asian (read Muslim) youth are particularly homophobic. Certainly, some interpretations of Islam, and some brands of Pentecostal Christianity originating in Africa and the Caribbean, are highly vocal in condemning homosexuality. As always, however, such sentiments obscure the class dynamics at work.

Delwar Hussein, a local writer who grew up in Shoreditch, talked of the real issues in an interview with *Time Out* earlier this year, describing the resentment that poor, marginalised communities have against wealthier incomers, including gays. Never mind that gay people can be working class – if you believe the press you'd think that gays were all affluent. He goes on to say:

"Religion is a red herring . . . I know the potency Islam has when used as a motive for such attacks but these kids are doing it for the same reasons as white working class boys – economic reasons."

This year's Hackney Pride was actually a re-launch of a much earlier Hackney Pride event in the mid-1990s when the Tories were still in power, the commercial gay scene was less well established, and there was still an unequal age of consent for gay men. Its re-emergence now arguably testifies as much to the growing disillusion with reformism and lifestyle politics as it does to the local homophobic attacks.

For many years, small gatherings and events have been organised around the world in opposition to

## With an orientation towards local working class organisation, the politics of Hackney Pride is community-led and uncompromisingly anti-commercial

from any residues of homophobia still existing amongst those less enlightened than ourselves. The utopia of gay liberation, its 'End of History', has seemingly resulted in our integration.

Scratch below the surface media images, however, into the real lives of most LGBT people and the realities are rather different. Whilst attitudes have indeed changed this does not mean that violent homophobia has gone away. If anything, the increasing visibility of LGBT communities has sometimes meant an increase in homophobia. Go to any school playground or yard, and you are likely to hear "gay" being used an insult and a term of abuse to mean boring, stupid, or not cool.

The mainstream lesbian and gay movement – for want of a better term – knows that homophobia has not gone away. Lobbying organisations such as Stonewall, who for years pursued an exclusive agenda of formal legal equality, are now focussing on re-educating young people. This is valuable work, but it doesn't really get to the root of why homophobia exists in the first place.

For decades, the LGBT mainstream – exemplified by organisations such as Stonewall and

homophobic abuse within the previous three years. Last year, the Metropolitan Police recorded an 18% rise in homophobic attacks across London, with a staggering 190% rise in Newham, home of the 2012 Olympic Stadium, and one of the poorest and most ethnically diverse areas in the country.

What none of the LGBT mainstream organisations want to talk about is class. Clearly, within the gay community, some people are more equal than others. Our celebrated liberation signifies very little if you don't have the material means to access it. It seldom includes those marginalised even from the respectable mainstream gay community. Transsexuals, for example, suffer abuse both from within and outside it. Forty years of gay activism has not resulted in our liberation from oppression.

This is why the organisers of Hackney Pride attempted to do something different. But why Hackney, and why now? There has been an increase in the numbers of local gays and lesbians being subjected to homophobic abuse and violence in the streets, at the same time as a handful of local gay venues have become more popular. Things have become so bad that there is now a Facebook group

the commercialism of mainstream Gay Pride events. However, the main political influences of such events – and within groups like Queerupt, for example – have been various strands of anarchism, feminism, autonomism and “radical” queer politics. In Britain, most far left groups have had only a marginal involvement in these anti-Pride events, and in some cases have been actively hostile.

To their credit, the organisers of this year's Hackney Pride orientated themselves towards the workers' and trade union movement, gaining endorsement of local unions such as Unite, the GMB and the local Trades Council. The SWP, the Greens and local MP and Labour leadership contender, Diane Abbott, endorsed the event, although none of the other MPs in Hackney and Tower Hamlets followed suit.

Combined with this orientation towards local working class organisation, the politics of Hackney Pride is community-led and uncompromising in its anti-commercialism:

“We want the event to be inclusive and show the unity of all communities in Hackney against not only homophobic and transphobic attacks, but all hate crime and intolerance.

“Alongside the community focus of Hackney Pride march is the increased de-politicisation and commercialisation of ‘pride’ events globally and for this reason we have set out to create a non-commercial event. No money, sponsorship or promotion will be received by any commercial businesses through Hackney Pride March.”

Crucially, given the potential for racial and religious tensions in the area, the organisers have been clear that black and Muslim youth should not be singled out as being uniquely violent and homophobic. As one of the organisers wrote in an article in *The Morning Star*:

“For us, it is clear that homophobia and transphobia don't come from particular communities but are part of a system which is present everywhere, including in spheres of power. We reject the use of gay rights to divide people and to

raise Islamophobic and racist stereotypes.”

All of this is excellent stuff. Better still is that a mobilisation from within the LGBT community, which is pro-working class and anti-commercial, succeeded in bringing out 1,000 overwhelmingly local marchers on to the streets for a vibrant, angry and defiant march. Even more spilled into the church used by the organisers for the post-march event. Some passers-by were overtly hostile, others were bemused, but many were supportive. The message of the march was that we would not be victimised, assaulted, abused or bullied, and that we were now the ones going on the offensive.

Speaker after speaker was applauded, with the loudest applause reserved for those most uncompromising in their defiance not only of homophobia but of other forms of oppression as well.

All in all, a refreshing change from the tedium of official Pride events!

It is likely that next year's Hackney Pride will be even bigger and better. However, there is no guarantee that it will be equally as militant. That depends in part on how the class struggle itself plays out over the next year. In the context of impending cuts to public spending and the beginnings of a mass movement to oppose them, there is every reason to suppose that it will be. And it will take more than a march of 1,000 people to tear up the roots of homophobia.

However, it also depends on what tactical decisions the campaign

makes in the coming months. One danger, as always, is that of co-option. When a Labour councillor from the London Borough of Hackney spoke from the platform and committed the council to officially supporting next year's events, many in the room were uneasy – although I saw SWP members applauding this, presumably as part of their post-election lurch to ingratiate themselves with local Labour Party figures.

We should be absolutely clear. Support from councillors is welcome, but taking the event under the wing of the council is a recipe for disaster. It could end up as nothing more than a local version of the big Pride events, with any remaining politics watered down to reflect the banality of mainstream party politics itself. What makes Hackney Pride distinct is the fact that it is activist-led, community-based, oriented towards the trades unions and independent of any elected official or component body of the capitalist state. It also sees itself as aiming to radically overturn oppressive socio-economic structures, however confused and varied the analyses of the organisers might be.

We should never forget that the Stonewall Riot was precisely that – a riot. It was not a council-organised event with top-table speakers and organised entertainment. As with all community-based struggles, maintaining this independence – organisational and political – will be vital in the coming months.

James Drummond

#### GREECE

## Greece in revolt; the second round looms

IN PR 17 we looked at the crisis of Greek capitalism and contrasted the workers' upsurge in the country with the apparent passivity of the Irish

workers facing similar cuts in their wages and conditions. Here, in an interview with PR, VI Gellis looks at what happened to this struggle in Greece and explains how it was



deflected from winning a real victory last spring when the struggles were at fever pitch.

**PR:** How do you assess the results of the last six months of strikes and protests against the government/IMF cuts packages? Has the government been forced to modify, delay or abandon any elements of the austerity drive?

## The indefinite Greek hauliers' strike which crippled the economy for seven days at the end of July was a spark that was about to light a more general fire

**VG:** The demonstrations led to a mass explosion of workers' anger. The general strike on 5 May led, for the first time, to conflict between the base of the KKE (Greek Communist Party) and its followers who were carrying PAME flags (their trade union body). This was the high point which was cut short by the government's provocation against the Marfin Bank workers.\*

In reality the only people who are hoping for some sort of solution are the international banks who have received many times over the amount of capital they have loaned. To understand how Greek debt has accumulated one must remember that six months ago Greece re-paid a loan which it had received during the revolution of 1821!

The Greek government is taking out loans to pay back previous ones and as a result the foreign debt now stands at €325bn and about another €50bn will be added to this in 2010. Meanwhile, public debt amounts to 120% of GDP and instead of getting smaller will rise to around 150% by the end of 2010.

The government will be obliged to proceed to take even harder and more vicious austerity measures. It won't abandon or change its policies

It is not intimidated by a series of 24-hour strikes and demonstrations; in essence a number of street parades at a safe distance from the centres of power.

**PR:** Why did the trade unions fail to intensify the protests beyond one day strikes as the summer progressed? Wouldn't an indefinite strike of transport and the public sector have brought the government down? Was it that the rank and file were not prepared for the sacrifices of an extended strike, or were the leaders of the trade unions too fearful?

**VG:** The reasons for the failure are political. The Greek TUC leaders who are generally known as "godfather workers' leaders" are political appointments, appointments which lead to their top chiefs eventually entering Parliament or some other type of state subsidised NGO. With such a career path mapped out they never want to rock the boat. The other union leaders associated with the KKE, under the umbrella known as PAME, split from the Greek TUC more than a decade ago and refuse to march together with the TUC. Despite the numbers on the demos and general strikes, no unified action was ever achieved. We arrived at the ridiculous situation after the 5 May strikes whereby the KKE refused to go near the centre of the city and marched to the tourist spots of the Acropolis in order to disperse.

After calling their own supporters "fascists" for attempting to storm Parliament, the KKE held a mass rally on 15 May where at least 200,000 gathered and where the usual Stalinist policy of escalating the fight in the not too distant future was announced; but the actual outcome was division, disorganisation and dissolution. On the one hand they refuse to strive to overthrow capitalism; on the other, they refuse to call for Greece to leave the EU - and so provoke an

Argentinean-style default - since they argue that capitalism will still dominate the country.

In practice therefore their policy is to strengthen the position of the KKE and their unions and little else; they have done everything in their power to keep the workers' movement divided and disunited. The rank and file showed its militancy at the 5 May demo when thousands occupied the steps of Parliament to demand that the "thieves are prosecuted" and that the "politicians are forced to pay". With this action the rank and file instinctively realised that the traditional one day token strikes were leading nowhere.

Without a united workers' response - joint demos, joint disruption of capitalist functioning (as happened during the lorry drivers' strike) - the 24-hour parades only have the effect of demoralising large groups of workers as the crisis of leadership becomes a crisis for the whole of the class. They could at least have organised a blockade of the IMF offices in Athens or called for the surrounding of Parliament to not allow the MPs to leave, or even for camps to be set up outside Parliament, something that would rally the people to the cause.

Instead the forces of the left demoralised and disorganised the resistance, by assuming that the methods of yesteryear (a general strike every so often followed by a march) would guarantee some type of crumbling of the will of the politicians.

**PR:** How do you assess the economic situation going into next year? Recovery or further recession and worse?

**VG:** In the April-June period this year Germany experienced a strong recovery but Greece's recession deepened. Tourism is down at least 15% from last year. Building construction (which represents 25% of GDP) has gone into freefall, down by at least 33%. Unemployment according to INE-GSEE (the Greek TUC's Labour Economic Institute) is scheduled to hit the one million mark by December 2010, that is,

about 20% of the workforce. Thousands of shops which are not part of large chains are closing daily – an estimated 17% so far or 3,500 outlets. The centre of Athens is starting to resemble a post-industrial war zone.

There is much petty crime, drugs are traded openly in broad daylight and at night the centre turns into an area where there are very many street prostitutes.

The IMF packages aim to speed up the sackings of workers to aid in the continued privatisations that have been announced in the train companies and the national electricity system which till now have remained under state ownership.

The full liberalisation of a whole host of middle class professions: hauliers, black cab drivers, pharmacists, solicitors, lawyers etc. aims to allow big companies to take over these sectors and turn the staff into salaried employees. That way they can increase productivity, and profits with lower costs possible for the consumer and other businesses.

One also has to take into account that in Greece social security payments for the unemployed only last one year and in order to qualify one has to have worked a full two years. After that there is nothing.

The consequent fall in consumer spending and the increase in taxes (e.g. an across the board VAT rise to 23%), the rise of official inflation to 5.6%, coupled with the short term increase in interest rates on government bonds (8%) and the three year imposition of zero wage increases in both the private and government sector, point in one direction only: a collapse of GDP and therefore the tax base of the government.

This is guaranteed as it is impossible for Greece to export its way out of the crisis while it is a member of the Eurozone and paying punitive rates of interest to foreign bond holders. In the first six months of 2010 there has been a 4% fall in GDP so if this continues through to the next six months we could be looking at around a 10% fall.

PR: When will the major social

effects of lower pensions, benefits and pay really bite? Will this force people back onto the streets?

VG: The demonstrations this year occurred essentially prior to the measures being taken, in order to forestall them. As such one can say the struggle was generalised before the crisis really started to bite across the board. One cannot predict what is going to happen next or when a new strike will provide a spark for a generalised anti-IMF insurrection. But no one, including the mass media, is predicting calm waters ahead; instead, everyone is waiting for a storm.

The wage freeze, cuts in pensions and mass sackings in the public sector, the looting of the population, the collapse of social welfare and the stopping of public works, does not only make people despair but it intensifies the crisis of the market and makes the recession tip over into a full blown depression.

When people are condemned to a level of poverty in which thousands upon thousands will go hungry, the state threatens to sink itself. Where

organised demos.

Due to the pension attacks about 12,000 teachers in primary and secondary education have asked to take their pensions now and quit their job. This has created a shortage of 20,000 teachers when schools open again in September. The government has announced it will only recruit another 3,000, leaving a massive shortfall which will be covered by compulsory overtime of between 5-10 hours for each teacher. And this is happening alongside reductions in pay of between €1,000-€3,000 a year for every teacher.

The enforced transfer between primary and secondary schools or vice versa to cover shortages is also one of the presidential measures passed. Women teachers will be hit by the retirement age being raised to 65. So the attacks on women and students are among the most brutal of the IMF-government measures.

So when the summer holidays are over students will return to schools that have lost many teachers, with an increase in the remaining teachers' workload and

## When people are condemned to a level of poverty in which thousands upon thousands will go hungry, the state threatens to sink itself

is the government going to generate the increased tax revenue it requires to fulfill the demands of foreign creditors?

PR: Can you say something about the role of the education sector, the role of students during the last wave of strikes? What role will students play in the September/October period in relaunching generalised struggles?

VG: Mostly adults were on the demos against the IMF. Students and university students, whilst taking part, haven't been involved in their own occupations against the IMF measures. Very many joined either the Greek TUC or KKE-PAME

with the latter having a big hole in their pay packet. Taking into account that youth unemployment has already reached about 40% for all young people between 18-25, a whole generation are never going to have a reasonable chance of a job so will probably see no point in studying.

PR: Have any parts of the far left grown in the course of the strikes and demonstrations? Has PASOK suffered a major loss of support?

VG: Many workers who had either voted for PASOK or the other big parties rallied to the KKE during the demonstrations. The demonstration of 5 May was



definitely the biggest ever since the fall of the military in 1968. There must have been more than 800,000 present – the centre of Athens was jammed, people could not march anywhere as the roads were full. After the IMF measures, PASOK politicians have had difficulty going to restaurants or appearing in any public place.

Middle class professionals confront them in almost daily tirades such as, "give back the stolen money" and "pay our restaurant bills". Almost always the police are called to "restore order" after various things are thrown at the politicians such as ashtrays, salt and pepper pots etc. But only three PASOK MPs have jumped ship.

The only real growth that occurred in the left was thousands joining the KKE contingents on the demonstrations, but this was before being called "fascists" by KKE leaders. This slander has provoked internal conflict, leading already to splits in one section of the official left (Synaspismos-Syriza, the ex-Eurostalinists). But this growth had more the character of participating in the demonstrations as opposed to

people actually becoming members. Yet the large number who occupied the steps of Parliament chanting "thieves, scumbags, politicians" shows that they are ready to go further than the existing political and trade union leaderships will sanction.

The indefinite Greek hauliers' strike which crippled the economy for seven days at the end of July was a spark that was about to light a more general fire. Twice in mass general assemblies truckers voted to continue their strike. No parties of the left either called for or led solidarity demos in support of the hauliers. The hauliers' union – behind the backs of its members – called off the strike for fear of it leading to a full-blown national crisis in the middle of the summer season. The KKE sent a representative who gave a typical trade union bureaucrats speech of supporting the strike on paper but in practice it did nothing to aid them.

\* This was the incident where three bank workers died when their building was set on fire during a demonstration in May

layoffs Germany's social democratic trade unions can be relied on to be completely passive. The real reason is that the bourgeoisie wanted to maintain its industrial capacity in order to have an advantage once growth picked up in any part of the world and, at least for the moment, they have succeeded.

But the German bourgeoisie, despite predicting the end of the crisis and "XL growth", in the words of finance minister Rainer Brüderle, is preparing the biggest attack on the working class in Germany's post-war history. At the beginning of June, the government announced plans to cut 80bn from the federal budget over the next ten years.

The cuts affect different sections of the working class in different ways. There are supposed to be 15,000 layoffs in the federal civil service, combined with a wage freeze for all federal government workers. There will also be massive attacks on unemployed workers: they will no longer be eligible for "parents' money", and the federal government will no longer pay retirement contributions for the long term unemployed. Around one third of the planned cuts consist of money taken directly from the unemployed.

Industrial workers have not been the main focus of the attacks. This is partly because the most strategically important attacks were already carried out under the last social democratic government (in office until 2005).

The SPD helped to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67, and to massively expand the number of part time and insecure jobs. The current government is hoping that its attacks will hold down industrial workers' wages by increasing fear of unemployment.

## Social Democracy

In a previous issue of this magazine Walter Held (from the Ted Grant tradition of Trotskyism) argued that the SPD had shifted to the left after an election defeat in 2009 forced it to leave the government:

"The defeat of the SPD has been a

### GERMANY

## Can the left meet the challenge of austerity?

JUSTIFYING THE billions of euros the German state spent on economic stimulus plans and bailouts, Chancellor Angela Merkel announced last year that Germany "would emerge from the crisis strengthened." And indeed, with countries in southern Europe still on the verge of bankruptcy, Germany recorded 2.2% growth in the second quarter of this year (an annualised rate of about 9%).

This growth was primarily due to capital goods exports to the global south, especially east Asia, not largely based on domestic consumption as a low euro

consolidated German manufacturers' competitive edge over other European countries, the US and Japan.

The German government was able to avoid factory closures and layoffs on a scale that hit other European countries by embracing a massive programme of subsidies for industrial jobs. Manufacturing companies were allowed to reduce the hours of their workers with the government picking up part of the bill for the wages.

These ongoing expenditures cannot be explained by a fear of the workers' movement: in the face of

liberating event for the party. Delegate after delegate rose to settle scores with the defeated line of the SPD inside the Grand Coalition." (see Permanent Revolution 15, Winter 2010).

If that did in fact happen, then the bourgeois press certainly does not agree. They have praised the SPD for its "responsibility" as an opposition party. Faced with the austerity program, the SPD is not opposed to the cuts – they only call for the costs of the crisis to be distributed more "fairly", for example with a minor increase in taxes for the highest tax bracket (after a much larger decrease by the previous SPD government).

The party still stands behind the "Hartz IV" programme of massive cuts in unemployment benefits, implemented by the SPD-Green coalition in 2004. Some "left wing" figures in the party like Berlin mayor Klaus Wowereit called for revoking the law that raised the retirement age to 67, passed by the CDU-SPD coalition in 2007. After a brief discussion the party agreed to call for the rise in the retirement age to be delayed for a few years – hardly a "left shift".

In the mean time, the CDU's coalition partner, the hyperliberal "Free Democrats", have discredited themselves with dogmatic calls for tax reductions for businesses and unabashed clientelism for sectors of the capitalist class closely linked to their party. In the 2009 elections they got a historic result of almost 15%, but in recent months their poll numbers have occasionally dropped below the 5% hurdle to enter parliament.

This drop reflects the fact that the majority of the bourgeoisie has apparently decided against the FDP's strategy of a frontal attack on the workers' movement. Instead, Germany's historical model of "social partnership", including a high level of integration of the bureaucracy of the workers' movement, is to be maintained.

The SPD-led government from 1998 to 2005 showed that it is easier to attack the workers' rights with a "comrade" in government. Germany's real wages have

stagnated over the last ten years – the second lowest wage rises in the entire European Union was only possible via this "social partnership", that is the integration of trade union functionaries in the government's commissions and companies' boards of directors, thus virtually eliminating the threat of strikes.

Green-Linke) coalitions as a model for government at the federal level.

It does so while the German authorities face a series of political problems – the ongoing misery in the education system, the controversial decision by the government to extend the lifetime of nuclear plants by more than a decade (which will profit the energy

## While these protests have been successful, they have not been able to challenge the continued dominance of the Social Democratic trade union bureaucrats

This "success" for German capitalism allowed it lower unit labour costs while those of its rivals increased, putting it at a substantial advantage in international markets.

### The Left

The biggest force to the left of the SPD is the Left Party. The formation of this party three years ago broke the hegemony of the Social Democrats in the organised workers' movement. Now, while the trade union top leaderships are still dominated by the SPD many lower and mid-level functionaries are closer to the Left Party.

However, in the face of the crisis the Left Party has moved to the right. In the past, the former party leader Oskar Lafontaine called for political strikes to fight social cuts and left wing figures like Sarah Wagenknecht described capitalism as an inherently crisis-ridden system. Yet in the face of the government's austerity package, the party leadership wrote on 3 July: "In contrast to the government we have a concrete programme to actually and permanently overcome the financial and economic crisis, because it fights the causes." The statement – based on the vision of a reformed, crisis-free capitalism – does not mention strikes.

The leadership hope that the rightward drift will facilitate the creation of "red-red-green" (SPD-

companies to the tune of tens of billions of euros), the racist campaign against "immigrants who are unwilling to integrate" started by a Social Democratic politician from the board of the Federal Bank – that have coincided with the first signs of resistance by the workers' movement.

Over the last two years there have been a series of demonstrations under the motto "We won't pay for your crisis", organised by the radical left and lower layers of the trade union bureaucracy. While these protests have been successful, they have not been able to challenge the continued dominance of the Social Democratic trade union bureaucrats: while the left wing alliance was able to mobilise 40,000 people to its demonstrations in March 2009, the trade union bureaucracy mobilised closer to 100,000 in May of the same year – and they included the SPD and the Greens at the head of their demonstration!

The next such demonstration will be on the European Day of Action on September 29. But the union leaderships are opposed to any kind of strike action against the cuts on this day, as will happen in Spain – they will only be organising a few busses to a rally in Brussels on this day. The trade unions are planning their own protests more than a month later, at the

beginning of November.

In this situation, the radical left – which has for decades been isolated from the workers' movement by the SPD – needs to recognise that there are no "short cuts" to winning the leadership of the working class away from the bureaucrats. Neither "pushing the Left Party to the left", nor

"influencing the trade union bureaucracy from the inside", nor any other creative tactics will help. The necessity of the moment is for Marxist forces to build up a revolutionary current in the trade unions and the workplaces.

Wladek Flakin, RIO Berlin

[www.onesolutionrevolution.org](http://www.onesolutionrevolution.org)

win for the workers, who got a 24% pay rise and a promise of democratic union elections.

News of the strike's success at Nanhai spread rapidly via text messaging and the internet, inspiring strikes at two more Honda supply factories – one at a factory making exhaust pipes for Honda in Foshan, and the other at a factory making locks and mirrors in Zhongshan. Both strikes won substantial wage increases. Since then, strikes have also occurred at factories supplying other auto companies, including Toyota.

Japanese car assembly plants in southern China suffered sporadic closures in May and June when they ran short of parts due to these strikes at affiliated component makers. These carmakers were hit badly as they have a "zero inventory" system for the supply of parts.

In the following months, further strikes swept through other foreign-owned companies in the south – including Hyundai, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Toyota – in spite of heavy attention by police. Workers occupied the factory meeting room at a Japanese enterprise in Tianjin. In Jiangxi, workers smashed factory facilities at a Taiwanese owned manufacturer of sporting goods.

## CHINA

# Strike waves signal workers' new confidence

**THE OUTBREAK** of strikes for improved wages in multinational companies in the Pearl Delta region between May and July of this year has been widely reported in the western media. Though strikes are not permitted under the constitution, labour unrests and strikes are not uncommon in China.

Official Chinese sources show the country's courts handled more than 280,000 labour disputes in 2008 and the number of disputes in the first half of 2009 was 30% higher than the previous year. But the most interesting aspect of the recent strikes has been the level of wage increases won and the clear demand for union representatives to be elected and be accountable to workers.

The background to this year's wave of strikes is the continued rapid growth of the Chinese economy in a situation where labour shortages have begun to appear yet workers have seen their share of national income drop.

Foreign multinationals have invested almost US\$500bn in China's industries, many in partnership with state enterprises. China's "economic miracle" is built on cheap labour. Its manufacturing workers are paid one twentieth of the cost of their US or German counterparts. Most of the 130 million migrant workers in China's coastal special economic zones take

home a monthly wage around US \$197.

This is 17% more than the year before, but in the same period labour productivity more than quintupled. The result was that unit labour costs actually fell by 43%, making it still very profitable for the multinationals to invest in China. Yet as the AFL-CIO trade union confederation points out, China's workers' share of national income has fallen in the previous two years – 53% in 2007, down from 61% in 1990, compared with about two-thirds in the US.

**The ACFTU is committed to act under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and works to ensure industrial peace and social stability**

In these circumstances workers in several parts of the country fought to improve their situation. The strike at the Honda transmission manufacturer in Nanhai began on 17 May, and lasted 16 days, making it one of the longest strikes in China in recent times. Workers struck for a big pay increase, improved conditions for student interns and more democratic worker representation. The strike ended in an unequivocal

Forty-three foreign companies agreed to pay 10-20% as a compromise with the workers.

Strikes continued into July when several hundred workers walked off the job at an Omron factory in Guangzhou, which supplies electronic control systems to carmakers in the region. The workers demanded a 40% rise in their monthly wage of US\$187. In the same month workers walked out at Atsumitec, which produces

gear sticks for the Honda Accord, this ended after workers agreed to a 45% pay raise.

Employers in Shenzhen who tried to claw back some of these wage payouts by reducing overtime and increasing housing charges were met with further walkouts at the beginning of September.

There is a new confidence amongst Chinese workers, particularly since a new labour law introduced in 2008 gave contractual rights to workers. There are reports of human rights activists, labour relations lawyers and university academics working to raise workers' political awareness and exercise their employment rights. They help workers make use of labour contract law to recover unpaid wages, compensation for injury at work and fight unfair dismissals.

Currently, Chinese workers' hands are strengthened by the laws of demand and supply. There is a serious labour shortage. When labour was abundant, it suited the government to have a floating population of migrants from the countryside that made few demands on urban authorities. During the economic crisis in 2008, many workers retreated back to their villages and family farm.

On the coasts, where the exporting factories are clustered, workers are becoming harder to find and to keep. Workers leap-frog from one plant to another, lured by offers of higher wages. This labour shortage is a result of demographic change, a direct consequence of the one child policy. The supply of workers under 40 has dwindled by as much as a fifth and the number of 15 to 29 year olds is falling sharply.

The shortage became glaringly apparent at the end of Chinese New Year in 2010. Millions of workers headed to the countryside for the holidays, but many didn't return. *China Daily*, the state-run English-language newspaper, said the city of Dongguan in Guangdong, where most of the world's toys are manufactured, was a million workers short of its usual population of 5 million migrants.

State news media have reported that cities were offering better

health benefits and housing subsidies to attract more workers, and anxious employers have raised salaries by more than 30% but still can't attract enough applicants.

Many who returned to the rural areas are staying put, seeking work with local small businesses and countryside entrepreneurs who receive financial incentives injected by local and regional governments aiming to develop their area. The internal household registration

do not actually get any training.

There are no independent official trade unions outside of the ACFTU – the All China Federation of Trade Unions. The ACFTU website says its most important role is to "unite with and mobilise the broad masses of workers to strive for the realisation of the country's socialist modernisation". It is committed to act under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and works on behalf of the government

## **The current strike wave exposes widespread workers' dissatisfaction with the role of AFCTU who collect dues automatically from workers' wages**

system made it difficult for migrant workers from rural areas to settle permanently in urban areas. Without an urban household registration, workers are not entitled to welfare or schooling for their children.

Those who remain in the industrial cities are under pressure from inflation. Massive economic growth leads to rapid rise in cost of living in urban areas – particularly in housing and food.

An immediate trigger for the strikes is anger amongst exploited young workers. According to the Honda Foshan workers, of more than 1,800 employees in the factory, 80% are student interns sent en masse from technical schools inland. They are not protected by the labour law and their wages are below the minimum wage level.

Contrary to the promise of free board and lodging, they have to pay for extra food (interns get one meal a day) and the cost of utilities associated with their housing. Furthermore they are not covered by any social insurance. Living conditions are crowded and poor, and interns cannot get their graduation diploma until they become regular employees after they have completed a 12-16 month internship. They complain that they do the work of a regular worker and

to ensure industrial peace and social stability. This it does in a bureaucratic manner.

Over the past few years, under the direction of the Chinese Communist Party, the ACFTU has conducted a major drive to unionise the previously neglected private sector and took on union-busting multinational, Wal-Mart, and quickly succeeded. Now all 100-plus Wal-Mart stores in China have an ACFTU presence. It also made an official ACFTU push to promote the use of collective labour contracts in the private sector – single, overarching agreements that would give equal protection to all employees in a given workplace, as opposed to the individual labour contracts that have prevailed in China until now.

However, when workers are in dispute with their employers, the AFCTU works towards what it calls a "win-win" resolution of such disputes. It sees itself as a mediator between workers and employers rather than as an organisation that fights for workers' rights.

Union officials are like civil servants, paid for by the government and many are appointed by the enterprises' management. Indeed, at the striking Honda supplier in Zhongshan, the factory's trade



union chairman is also the factory's deputy manager and other "union representatives" are also senior managers. Worse still, at the Honda component factory in Foshan, representatives of the local branch of the official ACFTU stepped in to mediate but ended up scuffling with strikers. Some workers said union staff had beaten them.

In Honda Nanhai, a specific demand of the strikers to the employers was to have two elected workers' representatives from each of the production teams negotiate on their behalf instead of the ACFTU, whose representatives sat in the meetings but did not speak at all.

The current strike wave exposes widespread workers' dissatisfaction with the role of AFCTU who collect dues automatically from workers' wages through the employers. However the demands are not for trade union representation independent of AFCTU, but for a democratically elected, worker-led local AFCTU leadership that is accountable and fights on behalf of its members.

This is unlike the rare case of a fight for independent workers' representation – the Ole Wolff (Yantai) trade union struggle in March 2009, before the current strike wave. The case in Ole Wolff was unique in many ways – the workers established their own union, the OWYTU, and elected their own union leadership in the face of opposition from AFCTU and harsh employer retaliation – the leaders were sacked but continued to direct the fight from outside the factory.

They successfully forged solidarity links to the Danish trade union 3F in Ole Wolff's home country. With solidarity and support from 3F, the OWYTU was able to negotiate effectively with foreign management through 3F.

The successful strikes raised questions about China's future as a low-cost manufacturing base. However, many multinationals are not pulling out of China but moving inland instead. Three inland provinces are wooing Foxconn, the Taiwanese electronics

company which raised pay by 30% in its coastal plant after a string of suicides by workers. Unilever moved production from Shanghai to Anhui which also welcomed the relocation of firms from Guangdong. Chengdu has already attracted IT giants such as Intel, Microsoft and IBM.

Relocating inland brings logistic problems but it is hoped that this will stimulate the domestic market. In the interior, 90% of industrial output is sold domestically. Chongqing in western China is leading this development. With higher consumer spending, China's trade surplus will shrink along with its saving rate.

In previous cases of labour unrest, China's ruling Communist Party moved swiftly to quash them. But in this case, they were only partly reluctant to get heavy-handed in the light foreign media attention. Instead, party leaders, including Wen Jiabao, the prime minister, called for improved wages and conditions. Mr Wen told an audience in Beijing that migrants' work "is glorious and should be

respected by society at large. Migrant workers should be cared for, protected and respected."

The Chinese Communist party views the strikes less as a political threat these days than as an economic tool to "rebalance" the economy. They see it as a way to help restructure China's current export-driven economy to a more domestically oriented and self-sustaining one. Better wages would stimulate domestic market and reduce reliance on foreign markets.

Since the strikes, minor reforms are also being made to lessen the grip of the AFCTU. The Guangdong Peoples' Congress drafted new *Regulations on the Democratic Management of Enterprises* in an attempt to "construct harmonious" labour relations. The draft regulations intend to establish official channels for workers to initiate collective wage negotiation and for democratic election of grass root union representatives to act in negotiations, though guided by the AFCTU.

Din Wong

## AUSTRALIA

# Minority government leans on the Greens

**►** AFTER THREE weeks without a clear outcome to the general election, Australia finally has something resembling a government. The indecisive result of the 21 August election led both the Australian Labor Party and the opposition Liberal Party to seek an agreement with one Green MP, one independent who had run for the Greens in the last election and three independents who used to be in the National Party.

The Greens had the wind behind them, having massively increased their vote. They succeeded in getting an MP in Melbourne (an inner-city electorate with a high proportion of young people), and consolidated their position in the

Senate. The swing to them was over 3% and their total vote more than 11%.

In the end Labor will govern with a minority government supported by one Green and three independents. The most right wing of the independents, Bob Katter, sided with the Liberals, while the most left, Green-aligned Andrew Wilkie, was always going to go with the ALP.

It was the other two, both ex-National Party members from rural areas, who really made the decision about which party was to govern. They will back Labor on most issues, but with both of them refusing seats in Gillard's Cabinet we can be certain that governing is going to

be a tightrope walking act for the ALP in the coming months.

The election was precipitated by ALP leader Julia Gillard after she was voted in to replace prime minister Kevin Rudd this June. He was thrown aside, along with a key ALP policy on climate change, when big business rallied against it.

The mining tax, an increase in the taxes on primary producers in the mining industry to be used to help offset emissions, while not going nearly far enough was a step towards making the bosses pay some of the price for polluting the planet.

The tax was of course very unpopular with the bosses and in Western Australia in particular they were able to convince the highly paid and privileged sections of the working class involved in and around the mining industry that it was an attack on them too. So for the ALP, Kevin Rudd (as the face behind the tax) and the policy itself had to go.

Enter Julia Gillard. Gillard cut her teeth in the world of student politics and has always been fiercely ambitious. Ostensibly from the left, she has proved herself no friend to the trade union movement and only months before the election dealt a major blow to the AEU, the teachers union, over the introduction of school league tables.

While the ALP tried to use the fact that she was a woman to promote her (it would seem that in Australia the idea of a "lady" politician is still a novelty...) the Liberals attacked her for her failure to marry and her lack of children. With Tony Abbott as Liberal leader, family values were always going to be one of the issues the election was fought on.

In the end the campaign threw up few surprises. Both parties said never again to WorkChoices (John Howard's anti-union legislation) while both parties outlined policies that differed little from it. Both parties vacillated on climate change. They offered various sops in the form of entitlements to working families. It's no wonder that so many, even on the left, don't think there's any difference

between Liberal and Labor – they ran campaigns which seemed to try to minimise any differences there are.

So what does the swing to the Greens really mean and how should the left and the working class orient to it? This is the main question posed by the elections. The Greens have been able to make a lot of headway with what appear on the surface to be more progressive

comfortable identifying with the needs of the working class. In many ways the rise of the Greens has gone hand in hand, around the world, with the decline in the left, and in revolutionary politics as a real influence in our class and in class struggle generally. That is clearly the case in Australia.

Unionisation rates stand at around 15% and there is almost no substantial class struggle. Struggles

## **The ALP government will have to make compromises in order to govern. Perhaps the real test for the Greens will be what kind of deals they will strike with the ALP**

policies on refugees, on war and of course on climate change.

Many on the left like to see the growth of support for the Greens as something positive. Both the Firefighters Union and the Electrical Trades Union, at least in Victoria, appear to have donated a large amount of union funds to the Greens. Certainly many of the party activists and members are also active in other social movements and the workers' movement more generally.

The swing to the Greens does indicate that people are looking for some electoral alternative to the ALP – a party that time and again has shown its inability to make even the most basic of the reforms that are needed. But it also means people heading towards an alternative that tries to straddle the clashing ambitions of big business on one side and the working class on the other.

The Greens are happy to use words like progressive and to talk about social movements and social justice. But they are not at all

that do exist are mainly defensive or for the most basic of working conditions – length of the working day, decent wages, safety on the job.

The ALP government will clearly have to make compromises in order to govern. Perhaps the real test for the Greens will be what kind of deals they will strike with the ALP. Although one Green MP, Bob Brown, has already said he'd be happy to make deals with either Labor or Liberal – which will surely not have been the intention of the people that voted for him. Whatever they thought of the ALP they certainly knew a Liberal government would be worse!

In the months ahead the unions and working class communities will be faced with an unstable government, and this could open up opportunities. Such a government can be thrown into confusion and retreat if the resistance to its attacks is broad and militant enough to show the new administration that it means business.

**Carlene Wilson**

FREE SCHOOLS

# Profiting from education

*The new government aims to transform the nature of our schools during the life of this parliament, bringing in private providers to help parents and headteachers cut loose from local authorities. Eleanor Davies explains how the coalition intends to build on Labour's reforms*

ONE OF the first flagship policies of the ConDem government launched after the general election was a plan for turning state schools into "free schools".

Michael Gove announced his fast-track academies bill in June. All schools were encouraged to apply to become an academy. Those schools that were deemed to be "outstanding" by Ofsted would be automatically accepted to the new academies programme. Primary schools are also encouraged to apply.

The Academies Bill secured its third reading in the House of Commons on 25 July and was approved by the Lords soon after, thus becoming law before Parliament went into summer recess and in time for the first schools to be up and running by September 2011.

There are already 200 academy secondary schools in Britain, set up by Labour. The essence of the academy was that any individual or charity with £2m to invest could be approved to start one up or turn an existing school into one. At a stroke, local and central government regulation over education of 11-16 year-olds could be slashed. In particular academies would enjoy:

- ▶ Freedom from local authority control
- ▶ Freedom to set pay and conditions for staff
- ▶ Freedom from following the National Curriculum
- ▶ Freedom to change the length of terms and the school days
- ▶ Freedom to control and spend their own budget
- ▶ Freedom to collaborate with other public and private organisations

Those set up before 2007 could determine their own curriculum, but those set up after had to follow certain

national requirements in maths and science at least.

The new law is another step on the road towards a free market in education, which was begun by Thatcher when she came to power in the 1980s. The Educational Reform Act introduced the controversial National Curriculum but it contained a feature which was much more significant for the future of schools: the introduction of Local Management of Schools. This meant that schools, in the shape of the head teacher and the governing body, controlled their budget.

Thatcher and her Education Secretaries were proponents of the free market in education, where parents become consumers, children play a dual role of consumer and commodity and schools are the providers. The free market requires consumer choice as its bedrock and individualisation its key feature. The emphasis is on aspiration and self-belief and individuals must take responsibility for their own actions and choices.

In the free market, consumers drive competition and they buy the products they want not the ones that the providers want to offer. Neo-liberalism said that the problem with schools was that teachers taught what they wanted and local authorities prevented parental choice by controlling admissions. For the free market to work properly schools are required to compete.

The ERA and subsequent legislation set up ways of monitoring and increasing the competition by establishing testing regimes, inspections with published reports and league tables. All ways of allowing parents to view the goods on offer and of keeping up the pressure on schools to perform better than their neighbours.

## Labour's education policy

When Labour won the election in 1997 Tony Blair famously stated that his three priorities were "education, education, education". He was fully committed to maintaining market forces in the schools sector. He went a step further and introduced the setting of targets for local authorities, schools and individual pupils.

New Labour's policies were based on a belief that a mixed economy of state control and private enterprise was the best for public services. Blair's emphasis was now on excellence, diversity, choice, innovation and flexibility in the workforce. Parents as consumers needed greater a variety of schools and so the schools were urged to adopt specialisms. Faith schools were also encouraged, as were voluntary aided, foundation and trust schools and, of course, academies.

Right up to the end New Labour was advocating the expansion of their academies programme. In 2009 they published what turned out to be their last education white paper. They stressed their desire to continue and expand their academies programme, to divest control from local authorities to individual schools. Their desire was to create a flexible workforce with the underlying effect of breaking-up national agreements on pay and conditions for workers in schools; in other words a break-up of collectivist systems.

"We will continue to accelerate the creation of academies – to 200 by September 2009, with a further 100 the next year – and of trust schools, bringing in new sponsors and partners as we do so. Building on the success of education institutions sponsoring academies, we will extend the powers of strong governing bodies to allow them to directly sponsor academies and propose new schools."<sup>1</sup>

Labour undertook an ambitious building programme in the guise of Building Schools for the Future to which the government pledged £9bn over three years. Of course teachers, parents and school children welcomed the investment in building, which had seen very little capital spending under the Conservatives. But the BSF also benefited companies as lucrative building and supply contracts were made available.

Dozens of new schools were built and major refurbishments carried out in a stock of buildings that had been criminally allowed to rot under successive Tory governments.

This is one aspect of Labour's schools programme that Gove will not be imitating. Also he has unilaterally cancelled dozens of rebuilds and refurbs agreed by the last government but not begun, he has made clear that any new free schools established (as opposed to transferring the status of existing ones) will be done on the cheap, using empty properties, taking over unused sections of existing buildings in the local community.

## More of the same?

So Michael Gove's proposal does not seem so very different from the New Labour project. In fact Michael Gove's proposals seem like a logical extension of Labour's school

policy – a consolidation of Tony Blair's neo-liberal education programme.

Education is increasingly run along market lines. The workforce, students, buildings and other assets are managed with the idea of breaking even or running a financial surplus. If anyone of those factors becomes unprofitable or threatens in any way to damage the profits then the service is expendable.

Workers in education are told they must be more flexible and entrepreneurial. The curriculum is geared ever more narrowly to providing business with what it considers an effective labour force, one that is functionally literate and numerate, obedient and market friendly. It must

## Behind the rhetoric of parental choice is a more mundane reality: the vast majority of parents do not possess the time, energy or skills to establish and run a school

be teacher-proof, standards based and market oriented. Establishments have to be measured and their output and status ranked.

The new "free schools" beloved of Gove and modelled on the Charter schools in the US and free schools set up in Sweden in the 1990s, are essentially academies, but with the important addition they can be set up by governing bodies and parents without having to consult the local authority.

In the initial wave of post-election euphoria Gove claimed thousands of schools would be well on the way to becoming academies by September 2011. In fact, about 2,000 schools have "registered an interest" but a mere 35 schools (according to the Anti-Academies Alliance, or 60 say government sources) have actually started the process of becoming one.<sup>2</sup>

As under Labour, academies will be able to control admissions to their schools with no interference from local authorities. Local authorities will not be able to require a school to educate a pupil.

The Tories election manifesto promised that if the school decides that a particular child is not for them then they can permanently exclude them without going through a bureaucratic process with the local authority:

"We will make it easier for teachers to deal with violent incidents and remove disruptive pupils or items from the classroom. We believe heads are best placed to improve behaviour, which is why we will stop them being overruled by bureaucrats on exclusions."<sup>3</sup>

They will continue to be funded by local authorities but the budget will be controlled and spending determined by the governing body. Academies will be able to decide their own curriculum as long as it is "balanced and broadly based."

Control over admissions will be taken away from the local authority, which means that schools will be able to cherry pick those pupils they believe are right for their

schools regardless of local authority boundaries. It is unclear what representation staff and parents will have on the new governing body, but it is hard to imagine that Gove will increase the current requirement of one parent governor.

There is no doubt that the new law will further erode state-run comprehensive education. We will be left with a series of separate academy employers all able to set their own contracts and tearing up and nationally agreed pay and conditions. Teachers will be employed by various employers, each determining their own contracts for their staff.

Joint trade union action will be virtually impossible as teachers will come up against anti-trade union laws preventing them from taking solidarity action with another group of workers employed by a different organisation.

## Profiting from publicly resourced education

Behind the rhetoric of parental choice concerning the new free schools is a more mundane reality: the vast majority of parents do not possess the time, energy or skills to establish and run a school. They will need rather a lot of help.

Parents in Wandsworth who have been campaigning for many years for a new secondary school set up the Neighbourhood School Campaign and they appear to be on the brink of success as the Department of Education is reviewing their proposal to set up their new school in a disused hospital. However the group have sought the involvement of private companies and they have been in discussion with the Harris Federation (which runs a chain of schools in South London), International English School (a Swedish company which runs a chain of 14 schools in Sweden) and Cognita (headed by Chris Woodhead ex-Ofsted, which runs a number of independent schools in the UK, Spain and Singapore).

Jon De Maria, who is part of a parents' campaign to get a new secondary school in Wandsworth, south London, says that is fine. "We're pragmatists," he says. "We don't have a school in our community and we want one. And

we need input into establishing it and arranging governance so we're currently talking to the experts."<sup>4</sup>

Toby Young, writer and broadcaster, is part of a group of parents who wish to set up a parent-led school in Acton. They too are seeking input from private companies and "school providers".

People like Young can choose from an eager, large and growing sector of private companies who already provide a range of education services here and abroad who make a handsome return on it.

Edison Learning is advertising its services as specialists in "schools' operating systems" to parents on its website. And consultancy firm Cambridge Education is offering on its website, "a complete package of support is available for anyone wanting to set up a free school".

At present, by law, a private for-profit company is not allowed to run a school, in the sense of being the controlling influence on the governing board. Existing academies are run as not-for-profit trusts.

But there is nothing to stop a local council or individual school contracting a for-profit company to run every aspect of a school.

Peter Wilby estimates the educational services sector in the UK is already:

"...a market worth close to £2bn, [providing] a host of services to schools such as personnel and financial management, and computer support. They also carry out school inspections, provide careers advice for school leavers, supply teachers who cover for staff illness, and run government projects such as the National Literacy Strategy and the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics. Though profit-making companies are barred from being trustees of state funded schools such as academies, several are exploring the option of forming not-for-profit trusts, allowing them to run schools directly, and then to make money by selling services to the trusts."<sup>5</sup>

Profit-making companies build schools, clean them and cook the pupils' meals, while publishers achieve margins of up to 70% on providing textbooks and computer packages.

Many of the companies that provide all these services would love to have a crack at running schools.

### THE MAKING OF AN ACADEMY

## Four steps to becoming a free school

**1** MICHAEL GOVE couldn't have made it easier. Just a few clicks on the new Department for Education website and heads, governors (anyone who fancies having a go really) will find four easy steps laid out for them.

**1** First the governing body must pass a resolution and then register their interest with the Department of Education.

**2** Next they must seek approval from the Secretary of State, although Michael Gove has said that he expects very little to stand in the way of conversion.

**3** The next step is to register an academies trust at Companies House, agree leasing arrangement for buildings and land, ask the local authority to consult on TUPE and secure funding agreements.

**4** Once CRB checks have been done and the necessary financial systems put in place BINGO! You're an academy only three months from registration.

The local authority will then be given an "academy order" from the secretary of state informing them that the school is switching and they are obliged to switch the funding accordingly.

The BBC reported in August: "Some education firms are already working with groups on their applications to set up the new schools. Others are seeking to get into the market by teaming up with education charities."<sup>6</sup>

The world's largest provider of independent education abroad, Gems, told the BBC News Website: "A significant number of schools have contacted us to talk to us about doing things differently."

To date making money by running a school is rare in the UK. Edison, a profit-making US company that was set up in 1992 and opened in the UK in 2002, is nearing the end of a three year, £1m contract to turn round Turin Grove school in Enfield. At present this is a rare example of a company employing the teachers, determining the curriculum and making money out of it while trying to improve exam results. But it is the future if Gove gets his way.

The main thing deterring these companies to date has been that to make significant profits while adhering to tight contractual targets means that firms want to be able to run many schools and not just the odd one.<sup>7</sup>

The economies of scale that comes with running dozens, or even hundreds and thousands of schools allows the profits to be ratcheted up considerably, as they share back office functions and even teachers for specialist subjects across different campuses.

Once they have the contracts these companies will start to see how the costs can be pared down to maximise their returns. Professor Stephen Ball at the Institute of Education in London makes this clear:

"Companies will want packages that are cheap and easy to teach, and require low skills in teachers. After all, teachers' salaries are the biggest single cost in education and, to make profits, they will want to keep costs down. At the moment, you are getting interesting areas of innovation from the private sector. But it's the loss-leader approach. They're still building their brands and creating goodwill."<sup>8</sup>

## Educational inequality set to grow

These plans are all about creating a market for education where the performance of children in the form of league tables is the indicator of how well or badly your school is doing. The well-being of children and their families plays no part in this competitive melting pot. Children are measurable commodities, some good some bad, and teachers are responsible for sorting the wheat from the chaff.

As in any market there will be winners and losers. Just as some products don't pass quality control and end up in factory seconds shops so those children not considered to be fit enough to meet the mark will end up in "sink schools" with very little funding.

The very fact that Michael Gove has invited all those schools considered by Ofsted to be outstanding, brings clarity to what is on his mind. A two tier system, where local authorities are left to run schools stripped of funding where those rejected children are forced to go.

### THE US AND SWEDISH MODELS

## Standards and free schools

 THE MOST comprehensive study on American charter schools, from Stanford

University in California, concluded that pupils in only 17% of charter schools made more progress than their equivalents attending regular public schools, and in 37% they made less.

Sweden's international ranking for pupil performance has

declined since the 1,000-plus state-funded free schools were introduced in the 1990s. The schools exclude "difficult" children and are able, like UK academies that do this, to record better exam results than local authority schools. Research also shows that free-school pupils in Sweden do no better or worse than others in post-school education.

Keith Joseph bemoaned the fact that the state had ever got involved in education and would have liked to have seen education fully opened up to the market with parents directly paying for their children's education.

The political situation when he was in charge of education meant that he probably would not have got away with such a drastic step but it seems as though Michael Gove has studied his predecessor closely and in trying as fast as possible to get rid of state education and of course all the responsibilities which go with it: safeguarding children and playing a role in their welfare, enabling children to learn in safe environments.

In the end regardless of whether it is parents, academic establishments or private companies running schools what we will end up with is a fragmented schools landscape.

### ENDNOTES

1. Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future , p7 publications.dfes.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/21st\_Century\_Schools\_Summary.pdf

2. At the beginning of June Gove told the House of Commons that 299 outstanding schools have requested to switch status, a further 327 schools (including 273 primary schools) have also applied. But these claims have not been substantiated.

3. Tory Manifesto 2010

4. The Independent 22/4/10 www.independent.co.uk/news/education/schools/swedish-lessons-are-new-free-schools-the-answer-1950142.html

5. www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/may/25/free-schools-private-companies  
6. www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-10967859

7. Chains of providers already exist: the Harris Federation, has 20 schools, while the Ark charity, backed by City hedge fund entrepreneurs, has eight. These remain not-for-profit academies. But for-profit companies have in the last 10 years started to run educational services that have been contracted out by councils. Serco operates educational services in Bradford, Walsall and Stoke-on-Trent. VT Group runs education in Surrey and the London borough of Waltham Forest.

8. Quoted in Peter Wilby Private companies will run 'free schools' www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/may/25/free-schools-private-companies

# Tidemills: parents vs the head

*Leila Galloway a parent from Tidemill Primary School Deptford, south London, spoke to Eleanor Davies about the campaign to stop an academy there.*

**LG:** Tidemill School is in Deptford South East London, which is a very deprived area, and with a very mixed population of students. There is a lot of poverty here even behind all the regeneration. Recently when I have been going round the estates with petitions you see how poor Deptford is.

On 13 July it was revealed in national newspapers that Mark Elms the headteacher at Tidemill had received a salary of almost £250k which included £102k for work he did as part of the City Challenge programme.

The campaign started in July when the media came to the school about the head's pay, but just before that we had our usual annual feedback with the school and a two-page questionnaire was circulated. One of the questions was "Are you interested in receiving information on an academy school?" I wrote to the school and asked teachers what was going on. Teachers said they were not allowed to say anything even though they were against it. On the 13 July the press came down.

The head and governors then announced that they were going for academy status, the consultation period was over the summer and there was a one-hour meeting scheduled at the beginning of September. I wrote a letter to the school about the two issues: the head's pay and the academy proposal. They produced something for the parents but it was very woolly. The second issue was to get proper consultation about the academy and I've never received a response to any letters I've sent. Then I was not allowed to see proper minutes from the finance committee, I visited the Town Hall and was finally told that I could see minutes but then only in two slots for two hours with the chair of

governors present.

Over the summer I got a petition together - so far we have 740 signatures, we have done market stalls, talked to shop owners on the high street. People are very cross. Most of the shop owners went to Tidemill as kids, and they are annoyed that people were not consulted. People have written to the school asking them for a firm timetable on consultation.

*A public meeting was held with Leila and speakers from other organisations: Paul Maslin (Lewisham Labour Councillor), Alasdair Smith (Chair of the Anti-Academies Alliance) and Martin Powell-Davies (Lewisham NUT Branch Secretary). Over 50 people attended including many parents, three of the school governors and people from the local community. After heavy questioning from some parents present the Chair of Governors walked out saying "[The consultation] may go beyond October or it may not - that's to be decided at a meeting [Governing body meeting 9.9.10]."*

**LG:** The day after the open meeting parents had a meeting with the Head at the school. The meeting was supposed to be an hour but the Head talked for 45 minutes, (there were two government officials who didn't say anything), so there was very little time for parents to say anything. It was not inclusive, most parents left the meeting, most of the questions from the parents were for detailed information like uniforms etc. But after the event the feedback from parents was that the meeting only gave them one side of the case. They had been told not to come to our open meeting the previous evening. Mark, the Head, had been telling people not to attend and taking down posters advertising it. The unwillingness to open up the debate is incredible.

The Head has been hostile towards me and asked me to put it in writing. This project is being driven by the head. It is all very

vague. There are lots of issues about where the school is located and how it affects the infrastructure of Deptford. None of these issues have been addressed.

The question of academies is a national issue. I was against academies under Labour, but under the Tories it's a different thing. They want to privatise education and push individual choice as "freedom". I don't think it gives individual freedom; it just ties you to profit. I don't think education should be about profit. The evidence from charter schools in America is that it does not work, that it creates social segregation. I find it incredible that schools are still wanting to do it. I cannot disassociate the issue of the pay for the Head and the move to the academy. Heads have more pay in academies. Every child should have equal opportunities to access the essential education that they need, the same freedom to develop.

**PR:** What are the next steps for the campaign and how can people help?

**EG:** We need to be strategic so the next steps for the campaign are to canvass the governors and to carry on putting pressure. We have had lots of verbal support and the Anti-Academies Alliance, the NUT and the GMB have all offered support as well.

We will continue to do the market stalls to inform people, to work with the Anti-Academies Alliance, get more parents involved and to push it from different angles including the community element.

It's mainly to get more people involved. To spread the word.

You can find more information from the campaign website: [sayingno.org/cms/](http://sayingno.org/cms/)

## NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

# Liberating the market

*The Coalition came to power promising an end to meddling with the NHS. But in the white paper, *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS* they set out plans for the biggest reorganisation in England in sixty years. Clare Heath asks whether this latest shake up will deliver the final demise of a state delivered health system, and looks at the implications for patients, staff and the healthcare industry*

IN 2006 we wrote that the Labour government was preparing the final steps in the transition to a fully marketised health system in which the NHS would become nothing more than a logo.\* We described how all the building blocks of a market were in place, with the separation of commissioning functions from service provision, the development of prices for services in the forms of tariffs, and the compulsory competitive tendering for contracts to deliver services.

Yet despite these reforms, the Coalition government has inherited an NHS that remains for the most part delivered through the public sector, albeit with increased emphasis on competition between hospitals, constant cost-cutting and many of the trappings of private business.

For the last couple of years hospital corridors have been echoing with the heels of consultants from KPMG and McKinsey telling us all how to be more efficient by "cutting waste". For them, waste includes "unnecessary" fol-

low-up visits to hospitals, people staying in hospital for an extra day while their home situation is sorted out, and the provision of procedures with "limited clinical benefit" – such as tonsillectomies, varicose vein removal and some hysterectomies.

Waste doesn't appear to include the employment of management consultants, some of whom charge £1,000 a day. The NHS spent more than £300m on management consultants last year, as much as was spent on skin cancer and lung cancer services combined and enough to pay for 10,000 nurses.

The Coalition government then came into office declaring "we will stop the top-down reorganisations of the NHS that have got in the way of patient care". They promised to increase spending on health in real terms, to keep the NHS free at the point of use and available to all, to give patients more control over decisions about their care, to drive up standards and deliver better value for money.

Within weeks the plans were concretised in the white paper, *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS*. Anyone who took at face value the promise to end political meddling will have been bitterly disappointed. The planned reforms have been dubbed the most radical since the NHS was established in 1948, and amount to a charter for the complete withdrawal of the state as a provider of health care.

## The drug companies get round the advertising restrictions in many ways, using the internet and sponsoring "self-help" groups to share information

If implemented, they will finalise the market transition that we wrote about in 2006 but that Labour failed to deliver. In aiming to create the "largest social enterprise sector in the world", they will force all NHS providers to become independent – as foundation trusts or staff-run social enterprises – that will then compete for business with any other provider who can meet the standards set in a new regulatory framework.

In summary, the proposals aim to change patients into customers who choose their own care packages; groups of GPs into fund-holders who will buy that care on behalf of patients; all services into independent businesses who will compete with independent and private providers to sell these care packages; and a new regulatory framework to monitor standards and costs. Public health programmes, including vaccination, screening and prevention campaigns, will be taken out of the NHS completely and be run by a national public health service delivered through local authorities.

The details of these changes are important for under-

standing why this is such a radical programme and how it builds on, but also differs from, the previous Labour governments' reforms.

### The patient as a customer

People will be able to choose where to get their care. Of course, this is not completely new – Labour introduced the choose-and-book system for hospital care, but it will now apply to GPs as well, getting rid of restrictions based on where you live. To help people become "informed customers" the government is promising a kind of "trip advisor" system we are familiar with on internet travel sites where patients are all encouraged to rate hospitals and departments online so that others can check them out.

Although this may sound like window dressing, it is actually a very significant element of the package. It is linked to putting the patient at the centre of their care – "no decision about me, without me". A fine-sounding slogan, taken from patients' rights campaigners, it means that patients will be encouraged to decide which kind of treatment they have.

This opens the door to the drug companies who can directly influence patients to demand their products, even when healthcare professionals may consider there are better alternatives. Patient demand for costly drugs is a major problem in many health systems; in the NHS this has been limited in part by restrictions on direct advertising by drug companies and by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) determining which treatments are cost effective.

The drug companies get round the advertising restrictions in many ways, using the internet and sponsoring "self-help" groups to share information. The Coalition commitment to the drug companies is found throughout the white paper, but nowhere more explicitly than with the creation of a Cancer Drug Fund to allow patients to get drugs that have not been approved by NICE.

#### THE NHS UNDER LABOUR

## NHS contracts boost private healthcare

 THE PRIVATE healthcare sector remains relatively small in the UK. About 8% of the population have private health insurance, largely used to top-up to NHS services rather than as an alternative. In fact the share of the health market held by private medicine fell by 4% between 1997 and 2009 according to health analysts Laing & Buisson.

The analysis looked primarily at elective surgery since private providers do almost no emergency

or chronic care, and found that the proportion of scheduled surgery which was privately funded fell from 14.6% in 1997 to 10.6% in 2008. In 2008 there were about 900,000 privately funded operations and 7.7 million publicly funded ones.

But this doesn't mean the private sector is shrinking. As Laing and Buisson pointed out, "this remarkable reduction in the privately funded share of elective surgery is not because private

healthcare is in decline". They point to the improvement in NHS services for reducing the need for people to pay for private care. But the private provision remains buoyant – while numbers of "self-paying" patients fell, the number of cases looked after in the private sector has been increasing, paid for by the NHS! In one year the number of cases paid for by the NHS increased from 53,500 to 151,000, taking the NHS paid share from 6% to 16%.

## GPs as commissioners

Although patients are to be provided with information and choice, it is GPs who are being charged with commissioning services, with around £80bn to spend. At the moment this is done by Primary Care Trusts that hold funds on behalf of a local population and establish contracts with hospitals, GPs and community health services to provide care. PCTs are to be abolished, and their commissioning functions will go to consortia of local GPs who, we are told, are closest to their patients and know what they need and want. Many of us remember an earlier Tory foray in this direction – GP fund-holding which was introduced in 1991 and abolished by Labour in 1997. That earlier experiment was a disaster – it led to a two-tier NHS with more money available to patients whose GPs were in the scheme, while most GPs steered clear, as they did not want to take on the role of managing large contracts and negotiating with hospitals.

There will be a powerful National Commissioning Board (NCB) that will establish the budgets of the GP commissioners, and commission primary care itself (can't have GPs setting up contracts with themselves) along with some specialist services. The rest of the work will fall to around 500-600 GP commissioning clusters, compared to the current number of 150 PCTs.

Each cluster will need support in order to fulfill this role: information services to predict need and plan which services they need to buy, contracting and legal expertise to negotiate with providers, IT systems, and commissioning expertise in all areas ranging from specialist cancer services through chronic care for older people to basic services such as contraception and sexual health. Is this all going to be done by the already hard-pushed GPs? No, most will contract out these services to private firms that are eager to help.

Waiting not so quietly on the sidelines to provide this support are Bupa, UnitedHealth UK, Tribal and Humana, among others. The health magazine Pulse reported that these organisations have already drawn up plans to offer GP consortia a raft of services, including patient and drug management systems, IT infrastructure, commissioning-support tools, and "back office functions" such as HR and contracting.

They may also offer to share the commissioning risk, presumably not out of the goodness of their hearts but because they see the scope for supporting commissioning that might just put more business their way.

GP commissioning, together with the involvement of private companies is not new; it was introduced by Labour in 2006. They encouraged practice-based commissioning (at individual GP practice level), together with a Framework for Procuring External Support for Commissioners (FESC) which encouraged PCTs to buy in expertise (see box).

Research by the Kings Fund showed that three-quarters of PCTs had used such help, about half of it with companies such as those listed above. In January 2010 about £50m of such contracts were known to have been placed, although the true figure is probably much higher.

These small contracts have given the companies the experience to now come in and play a much more cen-

tral role in commissioning healthcare on behalf of the GP consortia. A leading academic and head of the Kings Fund, Chris Ham, said this would "accelerate the trend" towards further privatisation, and lead to "opportunities for private companies to support GP commissioning and increased opportunities for independent providers to deliver treatment".

## Any provider will do – all NHS providers to become independent

Labour made major attempts to break up the NHS as a national provider of healthcare through establishing independent sector treatment centres, allowing independent and private providers to bid for contracts including primary care services, and through encouraging hospital and community providers to become foundation trusts. Unfortunately for them and their friends in the private healthcare world, progress was too slow. In the past six years the number of Foundation Trusts grew from 10 to 130, but around 250 acute hospitals, mental health and ambulance trusts remain directly managed by Strategic Health Authorities.

The white paper will abolish Strategic Health Authorities by 2013, by which time all these organisations will have to be independent in some form. Most will become foundation trusts, with less stringent criteria than currently required. Others will be forced to become "social enterprises", also regulated by Monitor – the body that regulates foundation trusts. The Coalition spins this as a way of giving staff and local people more say in the future of their organisations, but in reality it is a way of making them work as businesses.

Although officially still public bodies, these new organisations have considerably more flexibility than directly managed trusts. As with foundation schools, they are inde-

## The white paper will abolish Strategic Health Authorities by 2013, by which time all these organisations will have to be independent in some form

pendent businesses that can borrow money, sell land and buildings, and can opt out of providing national pay and conditions for staff.

Again, Labour's reforms went a long way towards achieving this. The implications have started to become clear in the last couple of years. Already, trusts have to compete with each other for business, particularly in larger cities where there are several hospitals or mental health trusts. The PCT or, in future, GP clusters, decide who to commission to provide a service, whereas historically they have had block contracts with several hospitals to provide, for example, basic gynaecology services.

Now they have shifted to a tariff system, where trusts get paid a certain amount for each activity. The commis-

sioner, trying to save money, will ask hospitals how much they will charge for providing services and then there will be a negotiation up to and including bidding wars. In an attempt to win contracts and avoid having to close down whole departments, the trusts will offer to provide services at a price that is below the national tariff.

If they then win the bid, they will have to find ways of providing the service more cheaply – driving down costs.

## Taken as a whole, the reforms amount not simply to an acceleration of privatisation, but to a transformation of the role of the state in healthcare.

Supporters of this approach say this leads to innovation and reduced waste, but in reality it leads to pressure to downgrade staff and pay, increase throughput and potentially put patients at risk.

With the whole NHS transformed into such competing business units this process will escalate. Staff-led social enterprises will have to cut their own wage bills in order to compete. New providers will move in to compete – including the profit and not-for profit independent sector. They have started to do this in certain sectors, mainly elective surgery and some primary care, but they will now have their eyes set on much greater involvement (ably assisted by their sister organisations who are in charge of commissioning).

### New regulatory framework

With a multiplicity of providers, there has to be a regulator. After all, the NHS is still funded from central government taxation. The white paper proposed a dual system

with Monitor as the overall economic regulator and the Care Quality Commission as the quality regulator. Monitor has the remit of promoting “effective and efficient providers of health and care, to promote competition, regulate prices and safeguard the continuity of services”.

This may not sound too different from the current system, but there are subtle shifts in the way that this regulation will take place. Under Labour there were stringent national targets set for trusts with the aim of driving up standards. Controversial in many ways, there is little doubt that targets such as waiting times and health-care acquired infection rates had a major impact on services in some areas.

Andrew Lansley has abolished these targets which he dismisses as “process” measures, and has said he is interested in the outcomes of care, both in terms of health (mortality rates for example) and in patient experience. Providers of care will be paid according to activity (money will follow the patient) and quality (a proportion of the money will be based on meeting quality standards).

Although details of this regulation framework are incomplete, it seems that Monitor will set a maximum price for services (a tariff) while the CQC will set minimum “essential” quality standards and then provide a star rating to guide patients in their choices. This is exactly what has happened in the field of adult social care, where private providers of residential care homes and other care services compete for business.

If that is the model to be followed we can look forward to further reforms in which patients get a personal health budget based on their “need” (as assessed by the GP) and they can then spend this with any approved provider. If they want a bit extra (nicer hospital, extra tests) then they might be able to top it up with their own money. Or better still, they could buy health top-up insurance to cover the extras, including things that the NHS NCB decides are no longer to be provided for free (such as varicose vein treatment, or fertility services). While this has not yet happened, it is a real possibility in the next few years.

#### PRIVATE CONTRACTORS

## What they say about the White Paper

**TRIBAL** (“a leading provider of public sector services”).

Business development manager Kingsley Manning said the white paper could lead to the “denationalisation of healthcare services in England”, and “represents the most important redirection of the NHS in more than a generation, going further than any Secretary of State has gone before”.

**ASSURA MEDICAL** (owned by Virgin and already runs 30 GP

services and 15 polyclinics): Bart Johnson, chief executive, said the plans “closely match its business model”, adding: “We are enthusiastic about the reforms proposed by the Government’s health White Paper”. KPMG is “committed to supporting the NHS as it rises to the challenge of reducing costs while maintaining and improving services” according to their website. Indeed they are so committed that they have

employed Mark Britnell as their head of healthcare. Until he joined KPMG in Oct 2009, Britnell was Director-General for Commissioning and System Management for the NHS, a job which meant he was responsible for a policy to encourage more private sector involvement in the health service. He even drew up the FISC plans which allowed a list of companies, including KPMG, preferred bidder status for lucrative NHS contracts.

## A national public health service

There are some bits of the NHS that don't fit well with a market approach, one of which is prevention. It is hard to make money out of preventing something that someone may not get anyway. It is much more lucrative to alleviate symptoms or provide a cure through drugs or therapy. The Tories announced a couple of years ago that they were going to separate out prevention and public health functions, and these are to be delivered through a national service and local authorities.

There will be ring-fenced money for this work, a commitment that has been well-received by public health specialists. This optimism is misplaced. Public health and health care are actually very closely linked – think of an infectious disease where treating one person helps prevent others catching it. It could easily lead to a situation where health care services have no responsibility for health promotion and prevention, while creating a "Cinderella" public service to provide vaccinations, screening and public health messages.

## Cuts

We have been repeatedly told that the health service has been "protected" from spending cuts. Except of course for £20bn "savings" that must be made over the next five years. Anyone working in the NHS will laugh at being told that the NHS is protected. Year on year there have been cuts throughout Labour's terms of office and now these are intensified. Naturally, they are not called cuts any more – they are CIPs (cost improvement programmes, keep up!).

In many trusts at the moment all departments are expected to make 8% to 10% CIPs each year. It is true that many things can be done more cheaply – for example, near patient tests (simple tests carried out at the pharmacy or surgery) can reduce the need for follow-up visits, minimally invasive surgery and anaesthetic improvements reduce

the time people need to be in hospital, use of texts and emails reduces communication costs – but to find reductions year after year is very hard, and can often only be done by reducing staff costs. This is achieved by employing less expensive staff to do the same work or by getting rid of staff completely. Often whole wards and departments need to close for major savings to be made.

## Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the reforms amount not simply to an acceleration of privatisation, but to a transformation of the role of the state in healthcare. Since 1948, the state has funded, planned, managed and provided healthcare in the UK. Under Labour there was a shift to encourage a wider range of providers, but the planning and management was still carried out by the state. With the latest plans, the state will have a far smaller role: it will fund and regulate healthcare, but no longer directly manage or provide that care.

Will this then "succeed" where previous Tory and Labour governments have failed in terms of bringing in the major international healthcare companies as major providers of care? It seems almost certain that this will happen unless there is major resistance. The most important factor is going to be the amount of opposition from public campaigns, but particularly from health workers.

Private companies will only find the NHS really attractive if they have flexibility on the pay and conditions of the workforce. They will not want to take on the existing costly pension schemes, for example. So defending the NHS is closely linked to defending terms and conditions, while seeking to increase control over existing services.

\* Clare Heath, What Price health?, Permanent Revolution 2, [www.permanentrevolution.net//?view=entry&entry=1398](http://www.permanentrevolution.net//?view=entry&entry=1398)

DEBATE

# Kronstadt Thermidor

In Permanent Revolution 17 we opened a debate about the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. In this article Bill Jefferies re-evaluates the nature and significance of the Kronstadt rebellion against the Bolshevik government in 1921

THE KRONSTADT rebellion and its suppression by the Bolshevik government in March 1921 has long been a source of argument on the left, especially between Leninists and anarchists. The former have justified the suppression as a necessary act of self-defence by a government in extreme crisis. The latter tend to see it as proof that the Bolsheviks were intent on establishing party rule over the working class and suppressing the soviets.

Kronstadt certainly was a defining moment of the Russian revolution. By 1920 the civil war was all but over. The war with Poland had ended in failure for the Soviet state but that state had survived and entrenched itself during the war years. In 1921 the demobilisation of troops combined with the economic dislocation as a result of the last days of "war communism" to produce a very explosive mix. Food shortages, peasant revolts against grain requisitions and what Lenin described as widespread "banditry" in the countryside produced mass disaffection with the regime. Even workers in traditional Bolshevik centres like Petrograd went on strike against the government.

## The Tenth Congress

This crisis was the background to the 10th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (RCP), a congress which saw the rejection of the Workers Opposition platform and the implementation of a ban on factions in the party. The congress coincided with the Kronstadt rebellion. It directly preceded the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP). This policy restored capitalism in the economy - initially in the countryside and eventually in industry - creating state capitalism, as Lenin called it.

The decisions of the congress and the consequences of the Kronstadt rebellion accelerated the policy of the political repression of opponents of Bolshevism within the society and the party itself.

The ban on factions, coinciding exactly with the

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Kronstadt revolt, ended what Trotsky later called “the heroic period” of the Russian revolution and cleared the way for the ascension of the party apparatus to political power. Stalin’s drive for absolute control of that apparatus was given a huge impetus by the 10th Party congress decisions. Thermidor, the political counter-revolution from within the revolution itself, had begun.

Trotsky, who eventually came to recognise that the Stalinist machine was the agent of Thermidor (though he dates its beginning from 1924, not 1921), drew no link between the Kronstadt events, the 10th party congress decisions and the rise of the apparatus. It was left to Miasnikov, a pre-war Bolshevik veteran and left communist, to oppose the suppression of Kronstadt within the party. For his pains he was expelled from the party and then internally exiled in 1923 (when he formed the Workers Party). He fled the USSR in 1929 when he went to France. He was tricked into returning to the Soviet Union after the World War Two and was then “disappeared”.

Miasnikov’s expulsion was carried through with Lenin’s approval. It came after a long period of his challenging the Bolshevik leadership over a range of issues. But it was his response to Kronstadt that sealed his fate. While many oppositionists at the time agreed to denounce the rebellion Miasnikov did not.

Supporting the suppression of Kronstadt became a byword for party loyalty. No dissent on this question could be tolerated and even those who had actually dissociated themselves from Kronstadt were branded with its mark if they continued to oppose the leadership. As late as March 1922, at the 11th congress of the RCP, Trotsky used Kronstadt to intimidate Alexandra Kollontai and the remnants of the defeated Workers Opposition, identifying them amidst applause, with the “banner of Kronstadt – only Kronstadt.”<sup>1</sup>

The consequences of Kronstadt were that democratic rights were further reduced, organised factions within

the party were outlawed, alternative political parties – the Left Social Revolutionaries (SRs), the Right SRs, anarchists and Mensheviks – were prohibited even if they agreed to defend soviet power. Freedom of the press was outlawed and the power of the apparatus to distribute posts and veto elections became unchecked. The party apparatus controlled the state apparatus. Soon trade unions were incorporated into that apparatus and controlled by it. The elements of the state machine that Stalin was to use to gruesome effect later were in place in 1921 and this was when Lenin and Trotsky remained at the helm of the state.

Why did this happen at the point where peace and the potential for economic reconstruction could have provided an opportunity to rebuild the social base of the revolution, re-energise the working class, strengthen democratic rights, revive the soviets, allow factions within the Bolshevik Party, legalise opposition parties that accepted soviet legality and re-establish freedom of the press? Why did the opposite happen and why was Kronstadt branded as a counter-revolution that must be crushed at all costs?

One way of answering this is to re-evaluate Trotsky’s later defence of Kronstadt in the light of a general reassessment of the process of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution.

## **Trotsky and his critics in 1938**

A debate on Kronstadt re-emerged during the Stalinist show trials in 1938. These trials saw the final slaughter of the Bolshevik old guard by Stalin. Trotsky, by now an intransigent and revolutionary opponent of Stalin, was the chief target of the Kremlin’s frame up. He was the alleged evil criminal master-mind guilty of everything from putting “glass in the workers’ bread” through to being a fully paid up agent of both Hitler and the Mikado.

Trotsky was in exile and amidst the barbarous din of a world sliding towards war was trying to get a hearing for

**A debate on Kronstadt re-emerged during the Stalinist show trials in 1938. These trials saw the final slaughter of the Bolshevik old guard by Stalin**

the truth. He organised the International Commission of Investigation into the Moscow Trials, the Dewey Commission, to refute Stalin’s outlandish, but at the time, widely believed claims. In the course of this the suppression of Kronstadt re-emerged as an issue, as the panel of enquiry sought to establish whether Stalin was the necessary consequence of Lenin and Trotsky. The hearing also coincided with the participation of the anarchist organisation, the FAI, in the Popular Front government in Spain.

Trotsky explained his view that the timing of this debate was no accident. The supporters of Kronstadt sought to implicate the Fourth International in the degeneration of

the Russian Revolution. They wanted to deflect responsibility for the bureaucratic tyranny and terror of the apparatus from Stalin, while providing cover for the entry of the anarchists into the capitalist popular front government in Spain.

Trotsky was right about the timing of the debate. Support for the entry of the anarchists into the popular front

### Trotsky implies the programme advanced by the Kronstadt soviet was a subordination of socialism to the demands of the petit bourgeois peasantry

government in Spain was a key motivation for his opponents. Emma Goldman in her criticism of Trotsky on Kronstadt uncritically supports the "constructive work" of the Spanish anarchists.

But the issue raised by his critics was still an important one. In 1921 Lenin summarized the demands of the Kronstadt soviet as "soviet without communists". In fact this never was a slogan raised by the soviet itself. The Kronstadt Soviet demanded the re-election of soviets. They called for a convention of non-party workers and the abolition of privileges for any one party, a demand directed at the Russian Communist Party (RCP) and particularly at its ruling officials, who abandoned Kronstadt immediately it passed an oppositional platform. But once the RCP had isolated the naval base, preventing its contact with Petrograd and demanded its surrender at point of arms, Lenin's summary certainly became the logical consequence of the Kronstadt revolt.

In the Spanish Civil War Trotsky came to recognise what he called "the counter-revolutionary character of Stalinism on the international arena". He explained that:

"In the Kronstadt episode and in the struggle with Makhno, we defended the proletarian revolution from the peasant counter-revolution. The Spanish anarchists defended and continue to defend bourgeois counter-revolution from the proletarian revolution. No sophistry will delete from the annals of history the fact that anarchism and Stalinism in the Spanish revolution were on one side of the barricades while the working masses with the revolutionary Marxists were on the other."<sup>2</sup> Indeed Trotsky went onto say that "enemies of the revolution" including those masquerading as socialists, democrats, republicans and anarchists, must be "mercilessly driven out of the army."<sup>3</sup>

It followed that Trotsky favoured soviets and a revolutionary army that would be free of the influence of the Spanish Communist Party if the revolution was to triumph. Instead of re-evaluating the events of 1921 in the light of this paradox Trotsky clung to the defence of the regime's suppression of Kronstadt. He dismissed the contemporary records and documents, such as the transcripts of the *Kronstadt Isvestia*, the daily paper produced by the sailors, and accounts of Alexander Berkman and

Emma Goldman who were in Petrograd at the time, as "false labels". In Trotsky's view it was necessary not to take such documentary records at face value but to provide them with a social context.

This refusal to re-examine the events of the early 1920s – and if necessary criticise the role that he and Lenin played in enabling the rise of Stalin – was a weakness that was revealed in the debate with his critics.

Trotsky's writings on Kronstadt were a response to questions from Wendelin Thomas, a member of the International Commission investigating the Moscow Trials of 1938. They consist of just three articles: a letter to Wendelin Thomas, a main article – "Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt" – and a postscript.

The letter to Wendelin Thomas in which Trotsky sketched his initial response, sparked a flurry of contributions to the debate notably from Ida Mett, whose 1938 pamphlet on Kronstadt inspired Paul Avrich, the US anarchist historian, to produce one of the most authoritative accounts of the incident in the 1970s. Victor Serge, the oppositionist *only recently released from the Stalinist gulag*, who was now sympathetic to the Spanish POUM, also responded to Trotsky's account of the events in a series of articles and letters. In them he called for a re-examination of Kronstadt's significance.

Ante Ciliga, a Yugoslavian Communist and oppositionist aligned with the far left of the anti-Stalinist camp around the former Workers Opposition and Miasnikov, agreed with Serge. Ciliga's epic autobiography, *The Russian Enigma*, describes the debate around the degeneration of the Russian revolution from within the Stalinist isolators or gulag as it was called.<sup>4</sup> He concluded that Lenin was the Cromwell of the Russian Revolution, both the leader of its rise and the architect of its fall.

### Kronstadt – a peasant city

Trotsky labels Kronstadt at the time of the 1921 revolt as a peasant city. He argues that the insurrection at Kronstadt was "only an episode in the history of the relations between the proletarian city and petit bourgeois village," that Kronstadt's population was made up of recently departed peasants and that the content of their programme – in particular their demand for free trade – was a reflection of that.

By focusing on this Trotsky, echoing Lenin's line in 1921, is laying the basis for the argument that Kronstadt was a petit bourgeois revolt against the workers and against socialism. He implies the programme advanced by the Kronstadt soviet was a subordination of socialism to the demands of the petit bourgeois peasantry for the restoration of capitalism in the countryside.

The flaw in this argument is that Trotsky is merely describing something that was typical of all Russian urban centres at the time. All of them contained large populations of recently arrived peasants with relatives still in the countryside. Kronstadt was actually a naval base, with strong industrial connections and historic links with Petrograd as well. The links between the sailors and the workers were decisive in the events of 1917. They had not materially changed by 1921. Why then single out Kronstadt

as a particular example of this problem of country versus city in 1921?

Trotsky is right that a key motivation for the programme put forward by the Kronstadt rebels was concern about the operation of the food requisition organisations that existed prior to NEP being introduced. But those concerns were legitimate because these organisations often stole supplies from poor peasants for their own consumption. The failure to get those supplies to the cities was a cause of generalised unrest amongst workers in both Petrograd and Moscow at the time. But to suggest that the Kronstadt rebels were subordinating the interests of the workers to those of the petit bourgeoisie ignores the fact that an element of such subordination had been a key component of the Bolshevik programme in 1917 when Lenin adopted the agrarian programme of the Left SRs.

The peace of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, also advocated by Lenin, was another concession to the war weariness of the mainly peasant army. It subordinated the militancy of the working class cities which in general opposed the treaty. The NEP, adopted by the Bolsheviks in February 1921, included fewer limitations on the rights of capital in the countryside and cities than those demanded in the Kronstadt programme. So Kronstadt's demand for the lifting of trade restrictions on the peasants was nothing new and was not a unique example of the conflict between town and country manifesting itself in Russia.

The Bolsheviks actually adopted the demand for the abolition of restrictions on free trade themselves partly under the impetus of the Kronstadt revolt and partly because of the need to convince the peasant Red Army that the Bolsheviks were on their side. This signified something that had been a regular element of the combined and permanent nature of the Russian Revolution, which fused the resolution of democratic and socialist tasks in a very backward country with a peasant majority. So why brand the Kronstadt rebels with a counter-revolutionary label for doing the same?

After all there was growing pressure in Kronstadt and many other places to replace the war communist system of grain requisition with a tax on grain production. Trotsky indeed had originally proposed just this in 1919, a whole year before NEP was eventually implemented. The requisitioning programme prevented farmers from selling their surplus in the cities and meant that they had little incentive to produce any surplus at all. Or if they did they would hoard it.

The requisitioning system led the peasantry to go on a planting strike. Levels of output collapsed as farmers only sowed enough seed to feed their own families. The cities were threatened with starvation. As the cities starved so industrial production slumped. This reduced the stock of goods that could be exchanged for grain. Furthermore, the system of grain requisition destroyed peasant soviets. It could only be implemented by bureaucratic command from the outside – no peasant council would have agreed to the seizure of its own grain.

It was also open to bureaucratic abuse and was a key factor in the creation of the apparatus and the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party. EGorov published this account of grain requisition December 1920:

"When I went back to the village and worked there on the land after being demobilised, I had no chance to read any newspapers and the only Communists I saw were those who lorded it over us in a manner never before permitted to any except the village policemen of Tsarist days . . . other Communists went on to the train and sheltering behind the word 'requisition' robbed everyone of what-

## **The NEP of 1921 included fewer limitations on the rights of capital in the countryside and cities than those demanded in the Kronstadt programme**

ever took their fancy, but spared the speculators – and this was obvious."<sup>5</sup>

Trotsky's explanation that the Kronstadters were bowing to the demands of the countryside could, just as reasonably, be directed at the Bolshevik Party itself. Yet his defence is that the difference between Kronstadt and other revolts was its "greater external effect". That is, its potential to become a maritime fortress threatening Petrograd rather than protecting it.

This is a valid consideration in understanding the importance of the revolt. But it cannot be used as a justification for singling it out for military repression. Surely it would be a signal to any regime that was trying to base itself on soviet democracy that a peaceful resolution of conflicts between the town and the country, the garrison and the city, the non-party masses and the party was now the line of march if the regime was to avoid degeneration.

## **Kronstadt – denuded of revolutionaries**

Trotsky says that, "After the liquidation of Yudenich (in the winter of 1919) the Baltic fleet and the Kronstadt garrison were denuded of all revolutionary forces. All the elements among them that were of any use at all were thrown against Denikin in the South" and that the revolutionary minority were replaced by peasants through the course of the civil war – "the civil war began a systematic depopulation of Kronstadt and of the whole Baltic fleet." He continues:

"There were still at Kronstadt a certain number of qualified workers and technicians to take care of the machinery. But even they were chosen by a method of negative selection as unreliable politically and of little use for the civil war."<sup>6</sup>

Kronstadt did emerge relatively unscathed from the ravages of the civil war. Despite recurrent mobilisations which drained the naval base and the fortress of thousands of its sailors and soldiers, and the evacuations of 1919, which reduced its civilian population, in January 1921 there were still over 50,000 people, military and civilian, living in Kronstadt. Contemporary reports contrast the politically motivated sailors of Kronstadt with those of the sailors in Petrograd as a whole:

"In September and October 1920 the writer and party lecturer Ieronymus Yasinsky visited Kronstadt to teach and also to examine naval recruits on their 'political literacy' . . . Kronstadt's 'red sailors' appeared to him serious and reliable, often good natured and always courteous, a far cry from the swaggering dandy sailors 'with gold bracelets on their wrists' whom he had seen milling around in

By 1921 the bureaucratic degeneration of the Bolshevik Party was developing apace. According to Miasnikov a new type of Communist was emerging, the toadying careerist who "knows how to please his superiors." Miasnikov attributed the rising to "the regime within the party." He said if someone dares to have the courage of his convictions, he is denounced as:

"...either a self-seeker or, worse, a counter-revolutionary, a Menshevik or an SR . . . What is Kronstadt? A few hundred Communists are fighting against us . . . What does this mean? Who is to blame if the ruling circles have no common language not only with the non-party masses but with rank and file Communists? So much do they misunderstand one another that they reach for their weapons. What then is this? It is the brink, the abyss."<sup>10</sup>

The Bolshevik Party of 1921 in Kronstadt was very different from what it had been in the 1917 revolution as Getzler points out:

"The decline in party morale was clearly reflected in the steep drop in membership, from 5,630 party members in March 1920 to 2,228 by the end of the year, many of them purged, but others having simply dropped out. . . Moreover the overwhelming majority (88.1%) of party members were of recent vintage, having been recruited into the party only since October 1919, with 64% joining between October 1919 and January 1920, i.e. in the aftermath of the victory over Yudenich's North Western Army, when the party's prestige had risen and in the course of the relentless 'Party Weeks'. A mere handful only were pre-1917 'Old Bolsheviks', 87 or 88 (3.9%) having joined the party during the period of the provisional government and some 180 (8.1%) between October 1917 and January 1919. Ethnically, 89.4% were Russians, 2.8% Latvians, 2.6% Estonians, 2% Ukrainians, 1.1% Poles, while 2.1% belonged to twelve other nationalities."<sup>11</sup>

The Kronstadt Bolshevik Party of 1921 was no longer the revolutionary force of 1917. The Bolshevik revolutionary fighters who lead the insurrection against Tsarism had been replaced with careerists, administrators and bureaucrats. But this did not mean, as Trotsky and Lenin argued at the time, that the Kronstadt rebels were made up of white guard revolutionaries and recently arrived peasants. There was still a real revolutionary continuity with 1917 amongst the core of the sailors. And many of those revolutionary sailors were on the side of the Kronstadt rebellion.

### Kronstadt was privileged

Trotsky claims that the Kronstadt sailors were privileged: "The country was starving. The Kronstadters demanded privileges. The uprising was dictated by a desire to get privileged food rations." This is in part true. Getzler explains that "Kronstadt was well run and its population quite privileged and better supplied than the rest of Russia, certainly far better than in the neighbouring Petrograd."<sup>12</sup> But he also points out: "By December 1920 food stocks were so run down that the chief of the political section of the naval base reported 'discontent among the crews about provisions'.<sup>13</sup>

How far the rebellion was motivated by a desire to secure

## The Bolshevik revolutionary fighters who lead the insurrection against Tsarism had been replaced with careerists, administrators and bureaucrats

Petrograd on the Nevsky Prospect, in the Alexandrovsk park and in the cinemas."<sup>7</sup>

The relative sobriety of Kronstadt's sailors stands in stark contrast to the strongly rumored lifestyle that was enjoyed by Fiodor Raskolnikov, a Kronstadt veteran Bolshevik, who was in June 1920 appointed chief commander of the Baltic Fleet. According to several accounts he and his partner Larissa Reissner enjoyed comfortable living, good food and servants, unlike the sailors under his command.<sup>8</sup> It was the ousting of Raskolnikov in February 1921 after an intra-bureaucratic faction fight between Zinoviev and Trotsky for control of Petrograd, which disoriented the Bolshevik apparatus in the immediate weeks before the revolt.

Yaskinsky's impression that the veteran politicised Red sailor still predominated in Kronstadt at the end of 1920 is borne out by the statistical data available regarding the crews of the two major battleships, the Petropavlovsk and the Sevastopol, both renowned since 1917 for their revolutionary zeal and Bolshevik allegiance. Of 2,028 sailors whose years of enlistment are known, no less than 1,904 or 93.9% were recruited into the navy before and during the 1917 revolution, the largest group, 1,195, having joined in the years 1914-16. Only 127 sailors or 6.8% were recruited in the years 1918-21. This suggests that the city was far from being denuded of the revolutionists who had lived and worked there in 1917.

Nor, as has so often been claimed, did new recruits, some 400 of whom Yaskinsky had interviewed, arrive in numbers large enough to dilute or even "demoralise" Kronstadt's Red sailors. Evan Mawdsley has found that, "only 1,313 of a planned total of 10,384 recruits had arrived by 1 December 1920 and even they seem to have been stationed in the barracks of the Second Baltic Crew in Petrograd."<sup>9</sup>

Trotsky's claim that the sailors had been denuded of their revolutionary core is wrong, with one exception, that of the Bolshevik Party itself. The Bolshevik Party had always been a key but minority part of the revolutionary leadership of the Kronstadt sailors during the revolution of 1917. Undoubtedly the loss of revolutionary militants from among Bolshevik sailors during the civil war was very serious and did reduce the quality of the revolutionary forces in Kronstadt.

privileged rations is far less clear. The uprising began following an investigation by Bolshevik sailors into the causes for a strike wave in January and February 1921 in Petrograd City itself, where workers were starving due to the crisis in food provision. The Kronstadt soviet resolved to send a fact-finding party of 32 sailors ashore on 27 February to examine the causes of the strikes and to offer the support and solidarity of the fortress to the workers of Petrograd.

But even so the relative privileges of the Kronstadt sailors did not make them more right wing than the general population. Rather it explained why they were more left wing. Their relative privileges meant that they alone in Russia had the physical capacity to maintain the traditions of soviet democracy forged in the revolution of 1917. Their programme [see reprint in box below] was not fundamentally about maintaining their own privileges, even though self interest undoubtedly served as a partial motivation. The programme was aimed at addressing more general problems of the economy and of democracy in the workers' state.

## Kronstadt was separate from Petrograd City

Trotsky contrasts the attitude of the naval base with the City of Petrograd:

"It is extremely important to contrast the behaviour of Kronstadt to that of Petrograd in those critical days. . . The Kronstadt uprising did not attract the Petrograd workers. It repelled them. The stratification proceeded along class lines. The workers immediately felt that the Kronstadt mutineers stood on the opposite side of the barricades – and they supported the Soviet power."<sup>14</sup>

This contrast stands in contradiction to the fact that before the rising sailors had visited Petrograd to offer solidarity to striking workers. The impulse for the sailors to rebel came initially from a series of strikes and protests across Petrograd in early 1921. The strikes were co-ordinated – to an extent – by the Mensheviks who were active in the trade unions. The Mensheviks, despite facing serious repression, campaigned for the defence of soviet

### DEMANDS OF THE KRONSTADT SOVIET, PASSED 1 MARCH 1921

## The Petropavlovsk resolution

HAVING HEARD the report of the representatives sent by the general meeting of ships' crews to Petrograd to investigate the situation there, we resolve:

1. In view of the fact that the present soviets do not express the will of the workers and peasants, immediately to hold new elections by secret ballot, with freedom to carry on agitation beforehand for all workers and peasants.
2. To give freedom of speech and press to workers and peasants, to anarchists and left socialist parties.
3. To secure freedom of assembly for trade unions and peasant organisations.
4. To call a non-Party conference of the workers, Red Army soldiers and sailors of Petrograd, Kronstadt and Petrograd province, no later than 10 March 1921.
5. To liberate all political prisoners of socialist parties, as well as

workers, peasants, soldiers and sailors imprisoned in connection with the labour and peasant movements.

6. To elect a commission to review the cases of those being held in prisons and concentration camps.
7. To abolish all political departments, since no party should be given special privileges in the propagation of its ideas or receive the financial support of the state for such purposes. Instead, cultural and educational commissions should be established, locally elected and financed by the State.
8. To remove all roadblock detachments immediately.
9. To equalise the rations of all working people, with the exception of those employed in trades detrimental to health.
10. To abolish the Communist fighting detachments in all branches of the army, as well as the Communist guards kept on duty in factories and mills. Should such guard attachments be found necessary, they are to be appointed in the army from the ranks and in the factories and mills at the discretion of the workers.
11. To give peasants full freedom of action in regard to the land, and also the right to keep cattle, on condition that the peasants manage with their own means, that is, without employing hired labour.
12. To request all branches of the army, as well as our comrades the military cadets, to endorse our resolution.
13. To demand that the press give all our resolutions wide publicity.
14. To appoint an itinerant bureau of control.
15. To permit free handicraft production by ones own labour.

Pertichenko, Chairman of the Squadron Meeting  
Perepelkin, Secretary

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power, the acceptance of soviet legality, the introduction of a tax in kind and a loosening of democratic rights. Of course there was a strong element of deceit in this approach by the Mensheviks. Formally they argued for such things but in practice their goal was the overthrow of the regime. Nevertheless, the discontent they organised and translated into action was real. The Bolsheviks had been losing support amongst the Petrograd working class. The strikes reflected that.

Some of the strikes were for the abolition of the stratification of wages, some were for the maintenance and extension of the stratification of wages. What united them was a widespread discontent with the desperately bad living conditions of the masses. The Kronstadt fact finding team reported back on 28 February, and this report inspired the 15 point resolution passed by the Kronstadt Soviet.

Kalinin Chairman of the All Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviet and Kuzmin chairman of the Kronstadt soviet were sent to "negotiate" on behalf of the Bolsheviks on March 1st. A worse negotiating style its difficult to imagine. Kalinin complained he had lost his voice and so left the negotiations up to Kuzmin, who addressed a mass meeting of 15,000 sailors and quickly lost control. In response to catcalls from the audience he screamed "We shot those who betrayed the workers' cause and shoot them we shall. As for you, you would have shot every fifth and not every tenth".<sup>15</sup>

As a result of this resolution being passed, in spite of the threats, by one of the last remaining genuinely democratic soviets in the country, the Bolsheviks sealed Petrograd off from the naval base. Emma Goldman recounts the session of the Petrograd Soviet where the decision was taken to suppress the uprising. Amidst pandemonium Zinoviev's resolution demanding the surrender of Kronstadt on pain of military suppression was passed. An appeal from the

it did so courtesy of the growing army of communist officials rather than the depleted army of communist rank and file workers.

### Bolsheviks – honest and upstanding

Trotsky claims:

"In the period when the revolution fought for the liberation of the oppressed masses it called everything by its right name and was in no need of frame-ups. The system of falsifications flows from the fact that the Stalinist bureaucracy fights for the privileges of the minority and is compelled to conceal and mask its real aims."<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, it is clear that the Bolsheviks slandered the rebels as white guards inspired and led by Tsarist generals when they were well aware that they were not. On 2 March Lenin and Trotsky signed an order of the Council of Labour and Defence which denounced the "the mutiny of the former general Kozlovsky", declared him an outlaw and branded the Petropavlovsk demands, the demands passed by the Kronstadt soviet and read out by a brave sailor at the Petrograd Soviet meeting, as a "Black Hundred-SR resolution". The amalgam was born – and later perfected by Stalin in his "Trotskyist-Fascist" slander campaigns.

The Petrograd Izvestia of 2 March described Kozlovsky as "the follower of Yudenich, Kolchack and other monarchist generals". On 4 March Zinoviev's Defence Committee of Petrograd denounced Kronstadt's Revolutionary Committee as "puppets who dance at the behest of the tsarist general Kozlovsky" and other "notorious white guards" and demanded the Kronstadtters' unconditional surrender or else "you will be shot down like partridges."<sup>18</sup>

Alexander Kozlovsky was a former Tsarist officer and the Kronstadt chief of artillery. After the February revolution Kozlovsky was Kronstadt's elected chief of staff. In October 1920 Fiodor Raskolnikov the commander in chief of the Baltic Fleet, awarded him a watch "for courage and feat of arms in the battle against Yudenich". His crime was not that he was a former Tsarist officer. The Red Army was full of such people, recruited by Trotsky in the teeth of opposition from the likes of Stalin and the Military Opposition in the preceding years. His crime was that he was part of an opposition and the defamation of him and the rebels was slander – pure and simple.

There is no hard evidence to suggest that the rebellion was directly connected to any white guard, black hundred or other species of organised counter-revolutionary opposition. None at all has ever been produced. The Bolsheviks case rested on the fact that bourgeois newspapers used the rebellion as an example of how the Bolsheviks were losing support.

That is true, but why amalgamate the inevitable use of propaganda of this sort with the rebels themselves? Why brand them as white guards when there was no more truth in this claim than in the claim that Lenin was a German agent because he travelled to Russia in 1917 in a sealed train supplied by the German military?

Lenin, above all, having faced that particular slander campaign should have known better, but in his speech to the tenth congress, without bothering with the facts, said:

**It is clear that the Bolsheviks slandered the rebels as white guards inspired and led by Tsarist generals when they were well aware that they were not**

anarchists Goldman, Berkman, Perkus, Petrovsky, for the soviet to reconsider was rejected the day it was written on 5 March<sup>16</sup> and an ultimatum written by Trotsky was issued to the Kronstadtters.

The Cheka instituted martial law. Concessions to the demands for improved rations were made but at the same time the Kronstadtters were denounced as black hundreds and white guards led by Tsarist generals.

According to Miasnikov "Red Petrograd" was a "Potemkin village". The Astoria Hotel where many high officials lived was the scene of debauchery, while ordinary citizens went without the bare necessities. Miasnikov was assigned to a party unit detailed to forage for food. He found that his colleagues were not "bread-gatherers" but "bread-eaters". If Petrograd did support soviet power against Kronstadt

"I have no doubt that this mutiny, which very quickly revealed to us the familiar figures of white guard generals, will be put down within the next few days, if not hours."<sup>19</sup>

In plain English that was a lie.

## Trotsky's involvement in crushing the rebellion

Trotsky claims in an article in July 1938 that he played no part personally in the military suppression of Kronstadt or its aftermath of executions, while being clear he was part of the political decision to use force if Kronstadt refused to surrender. "But after the decision was taken I continued to remain in Moscow and took no part direct or indirect in the military operations. Concerning the subsequent repressions, they were completely the affair of the Cheka."<sup>20</sup>

Trotsky signed the 2 March declaration with Lenin and, as War Commissar and Chairman of the Revolutionary War Council, exercised general responsibility for the suppression of Kronstadt. He visited Petrograd, Oranienbaum and Krasnaya Gorka on 5 March and oversaw Bolshevik military preparations.

He will have been fully informed of the plans for the suppression of the uprising undertaken by Tuchachevsky. As for not knowing about the numbers of victims subsequently executed in the Cheka's crack down, Trotsky certainly could have found out the information if he had wanted to and was certainly fully aware of the Cheka's regime of martial law.

But protesting that he had no real involvement in the repression sits uneasily with the "Ultimatum" he issued on 5 March 1921 stating, "I am issuing instructions that all preparations be made to suppress the rebellion and the insurrectionists by force of arms . . . This is the last warning."<sup>21</sup>

Fairly unambiguous involvement by any standard.

According to Serge the Cheka executed hundreds of Kronstadt rebels in the subsequent months. Lenin and Trotsky were fully aware of what was going on and by associating the rebels with white guards had justified this repression in the name of socialism. Except that socialism did not follow these tragic events.

In his letter to Wendelin Thomas in 1937, Trotsky summarised his position thus:

"The country was starving. The Kronstadt rebels demanded privileges. The uprising was dictated by a desire to get privileged food rations. The sailors had cannon and battleships. All the reactionary elements in Russia as well as abroad, immediately seized upon this uprising. The white émigrés demanded aid for the insurrectionists. The victory of this uprising could bring nothing but a victory of counter-revolution, entirely independent of the ideas the sailors had in their heads. But the ideas themselves were deeply reactionary. They reflected the hostility of the backward peasantry to the worker, the conceit of the soldier or sailor in relation to the 'civilian' Petersburg, the hatred of the petit bourgeois for revolutionary discipline. The movement therefore had a counter-revolutionary character and since the insurgents took possession

of the arms in the forts they could only be crushed with the aid of arms."<sup>22</sup>

Taken as a whole we have seen that the essential elements of Trotsky's analysis do not stand up to scrutiny. Certainly the white guards did attempt to rally support for Kronstadt. But the Kronstadt rebels turned down their aid. Their ideas in terms of their agrarian programme were a less pro-capitalist version of the reforms that the Bolsheviks themselves implemented at the same time.

## Kronstadt, the Workers Opposition and the Bolshevik Party

The historic significance of the suppression of Kronstadt was that this action coincided with the fatal undermining of the Bolshevik Party itself as a democratic instrument of working class rule.

In the run up to the tenth Congress there had been a bitter internal dispute over proposals initially jointly presented by Lenin and Trotsky for the militarisation of labour. The idea was that the gravity of the economic crisis meant that labour needed to be allocated from above so that it could be used in the most timely and efficient manner. Lenin split from Trotsky during the course of the discussion, but the degree of state control anticipated in Trotsky's theses and the relegation of the role of trade unions to "educational" bodies advocated by Lenin, led to the rise of the Workers Opposition.

The Workers Opposition proposed that the trade unions should exercise control over industrial production as had been envisaged in the Bolshevik programme as late as 1920. Based on the trade union section of the Bolshevik Party and lead by Shlyapnikov and Kollontai, the Workers Opposition pointed out that the idea of "state capitalism" using capitalist state forms to build socialism was

**The significance of Kronstadt was that it coincided with the undermining of the Bolshevik Party as a democratic instrument of working class rule**

antithetical to the idea of the self-emancipation of the working class.

Kollontai's pamphlet, *The Platform of the Workers Opposition*, argued that Lenin's advocacy of the use of capitalist specialists to manage industry to introduce what Lenin called "state capitalism" effectively abandoned the Marxist position for the smashing of the capitalist state and its replacement by a semi-state that was transitional to socialism.

Shlyapnikov explained:

"The basis of the controversy, revolves around the question by what means during this period of transformation can our Communist Party carry out its economic policy' whether by means of workers organized into their class unions, or over their heads by bureaucratic means,

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through canonised functionaries of the state.”<sup>23</sup>

By 1921 Lenin had come a long way from the position he advocated in *The State and Revolution*, published in March 1918, in which he explained that every cook shall rule. Now he said “Can every worker know how to administer the state? Practical people know that this is a fairy tale... The trade unions are a school of communism and admin-

### The suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion in 1921 may or may not have been necessary for the maintenance of Bolshevik rule

istration. When they have spent many years at school, they will learn, but it progresses slowly.”<sup>24</sup>

In other words by 1921 Lenin had repudiated the idea that the workers learn how to govern by governing. Rather they would be trained how to govern by the trade unions, while in the meantime the state was not withering away but being strengthened, run by Communist administrators using bourgeois specialists to restore production on the basis of state capitalism.

This may or may not have been necessary given the collapse of industry by 1921, but it is not difficult to see how it could, and indeed did, morph into the rule of the administration, albeit “communist” administration, over the working class. The self-emancipation of the working class by their own actions was replaced by the apparatus acting on what they thought was their behalf.

There are certainly many weaknesses in the Workers Opposition platform, but its analysis of the rise of the bureaucracy, the crushing of industrial democracy, as well as the causes of that development – the isolation of the revolution, the poverty of the masses, the demands of the civil war, the backwardness of the country and the growth of the bureaucratism within the state – form the core of Trotsky’s own later analysis of the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution as outlined in his 1936 book, *The Revolution Betrayed*.

Nonetheless it is the response of Lenin and Trotsky and the apparatus to the Workers Opposition in general which is most revealing, notwithstanding the nuances of the debate. Unlike the debate over Brest-Litovsk which was had out openly, including in rival publications, the Workers Opposition was stigmatised from the outset.

Its supporters were bureaucratically blocked from election to conferences; its support in the rank and file of the party and trade unions was not represented in the high echelons of the party apparatus.

Lenin’s speeches to the tenth congress of the RCP creates an amalgam between the Opposition itself, Kronstadt and the white guards. Lenin says:

“What does it mean? It was an attempt to seize political power from the Bolsheviks by a motley crowd or alliance of ill-assorted elements, apparently just to the right of the Bolsheviks, or perhaps even to their “left” – you can’t

really tell, so amorphous is the combination of political groupings that has tried to take power in Kronstadt. You all know, undoubtedly, that at the same time whiteguard generals were very active over there. There is ample proof of this.”<sup>25</sup>

He then goes on to say that the Kronstadt sailors and workers “wanted to correct the Bolsheviks in regard to restrictions in trade – and this looks like a small shift, which leaves the same slogans of ‘Soviet power’ with ever so slight a change or correction. Yet in actual fact the white guards only used the non-party elements as a stepping stone to get in.”<sup>26</sup>

Why does he think even a small shift in policy is a stepping stone to counter-revolution? Because by this point Lenin had decided that soviet power was Bolshevik power, or more accurately the power of the Bolshevik apparatus. Lenin was no more tolerant towards opposition from within the Bolshevik Party itself. Like the Kronstadters he explains the Workers Opposition only wanted to “correct the regime a little” but declares Lenin:

“don’t talk as Shlyapnikov has done... Why is Shlyapnikov not prosecuted for making such statements? Are we seriously discussing discipline and unity in an organised Party, or are we at a meeting of the Kronstadt type? For his is a Kronstadt, anarchist type of statement, to which the response is a gun.”<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, Lenin later apologised for using such language<sup>28</sup> but the damage was done. Trotsky added, “The Workers Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans, fetishising the principles of democracy. They seem to have placed the workers’ voting rights above the party, as if the party did not have the right to defend its dictatorship, even if that dictatorship were to collide for a time with the transitory mood of the workers’ democracy.”<sup>29</sup>

This approach was to become the hallmark of Stalin’s transformation of the party and the state – all opposition equals counter-revolution. Lenin and Trotsky’s approach to Kronstadt paved the way for this.

The suppression of Kronstadt may or may not have been necessary for the maintenance of Bolshevik rule. There may have been possibilities for a compromise with it – indeed an estimated third of the delegates elected to the Kronstadt Soviet were communists, that is RCP members, who were recognised as “plenipotentiary delegates of units and organisation on a par with other [non-party] members”<sup>30</sup>, but once the threats had been made against it and supplies cut off from the city, the next steps were inevitable. The Bolsheviks may have feared an agrarian counter-revolution, but in fact they themselves restored capitalism in the countryside through NEP.

The suppression of Kronstadt was part of Thermidor and the beginning of the bureaucratic counter-revolution. Trotsky’s failure to re-address the responsibility both he and Lenin bore for the events, and the part that this played in the rise of the apparatus and bureaucratic counter-revolution in the 1930s had profound consequences.

It meant that the chance was missed to reconsider and break with the bureaucratic practices that the events of 1921 turned from exceptions into a norm – and that were then embedded in the Fourth International and have become the everyday practices of the entire left as a result.

The stigmatising of opposition, the dishonest representation of opponents, the manoeuvres and rigging of votes, the use of amalgams to present disagreements as "objectively" representing something they do not, the unelected and unaccountable bureaucrat/apparatus, the subordination of the membership to the party line

- all of this flows from the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party after 1921 and is a direct legacy of Kronstadt and its suppression.

A re-evaluation of all this can only begin with a re-evaluation of the source of the origin of the method in the first place.

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## DEBATE – RUSSIA

# The real meaning of Thermidor in the Russian Revolution

*Did Lenin and Trotsky lead a counter-revolution in 1921? Stuart King says this is misreading both of the French and Russian revolutions.*

MARK HOSKISSON'S article in PR17, *The Red Jacobins: Thermidor and the Russian Revolution in 1921*, raises some interesting arguments about how Trotsky's incorrect understanding of Thermidor hampered the opposition's struggle against Stalin.

However there are a number of serious weaknesses in the article which amount to an erroneous view of the revolution in the early 1920s. They revolve around the following points:

1. In trying to move back the date of Thermidor (political counter-revolution in Russia) to 1921, Mark has to exaggerate and bring forward the point at which democracy in the party is crushed.

2. In arguing this Mark changes the definition of Thermidor itself – he confuses its starting point with its end point, or rather fails to see it as a process, "counter-revolution in instalments" as Trotsky correctly describes the phenomenon.

3. As a result of this redefinition of Thermidor, Lenin (not Stalin) becomes the initiator of counter-revolution in Russia, and Trotsky becomes his collaborator.

4. Finally there is an unproven link made between the bureaucratic centralism of the Trotskyist left today and its failure to confront the "original sin" of 1921.

### Thermidor in France, Thermidor in Russia

The Bolsheviks discussed the analogy with Thermidor in the French Revolution for good reason: it was a revolution that degenerated from within. The forces that struck at the masses and ended its heroic revolutionary phase were a section of the leaders of the revolution itself.

The Thermidorians, members of the Committee of Public Safety and Committee for General Security, led their

"coup" of 9th Thermidor (27 July 1794) against Robespierre, the leader of the Jacobins and his supporters.

Thermidor opened up a period of consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie, a consolidation which involved a series of repressive measures against the plebeian masses (sans-culottes) between July 1794 - and August 1795. These measures included the abolition of price controls, the banning of the popular societies and the revolutionary committees, closure of the Jacobin Club, the use of white terror to intimidate the sections, the introduction of property qualifications for the National Assembly and removing the National Guard from the control of the sections. Thermidor as a counter-revolutionary process was only finally completed in 1799 with the installing of Napoleon Bonaparte as dictatorial leader.

Even before 27 July, Robespierre had taken a series of measures against the growing demands of the sans-culottes. In the autumn of 1793 measures were introduced to try and restrict section meetings and to prevent the organisation of popular societies outside the control of the Jacobin Club.

Jacques Roux, a popular leader of the so-called enraged wing of the sans-culottes was arrested. In early 1794 the Hebertists were purged for their campaign against the Church – Hebert was guillotined, Roux only escaped the same fate by committing suicide. These actions against the masses partly explained the lack of support for Robespierre when the Thermidorians struck, and the mistaken complicity of some from the left in the coup.<sup>1</sup>

One can see why the Bolsheviks saw the relevance of the analogy with Thermidor. They rightly associated it with any tendencies within the revolution aiming to throw back the working masses, putting an end to the forward movement of the revolution. They identified it with forces making compromises with capitalism, rich

peasants, and international imperialism. Thermidor in the party/state was seen as a process that would open the door to the restoration of capitalism and the crushing of the workers' movement.

Mark correctly points out that the Trotskyist opposition followed this analysis of the source of the counter-revolution until 1935 when Trotsky revised his understanding:

"Thus the present day domination of Stalin in no way resembles Soviet rule during the initial years of the revolution. The substitution of one regime for the other occurred not at a single stroke but through a series of measures, by means of a number of civil wars waged by the bureaucracy against the proletarian vanguard... The smashing of the left opposition implied in the most direct and immediate sense the transfer of power from the hands of the revolutionary vanguard into the hands of the more conservative elements among the bureaucracy and the upper crust of the working class. The year 1924 - that was the beginning of Soviet Thermidor."<sup>2</sup>

Trotsky also realised that just as the Thermidorians carried out a counter-revolution while consolidating the gains of the bourgeois revolution, so the Stalinist bureaucracy could carry through a counter-revolution (against workers' political power) without overthrowing the workers' state. Belatedly he recognised that the threat came from the party centre, with its roots in the bureaucracy, as well as from the right, with its links with the Kulaks (rich peasants) and NEP-men (traders).

The question is when did this bureaucratic counter-revolution take place, how do we define it, and who led it? Mark suggests it happened in 1921 rather than as Trotsky suggests a process starting in 1924.

Mark argues that Thermidor took place with the attack on the "Red Jacobins", the Workers Opposition (WO) and the Democratic Centralists (DC), in 1921. Thermidor, Mark argues, consists of: the banning of factions at the tenth congress, the suppression of Kronstadt and the establishing of a monolithic party (the raising the central apparatus to a position of absolute control of all party matters). He draws the conclusion that:

"The political counter-revolution took place inside the Bolshevik Party. It was led by Lenin, supported by Trotsky and executed by Stalin. The possibility of advance through the Bolshevik Party was eliminated."<sup>3</sup>

There are a number of errors here. First Mark sees Thermidor as "a stroke" rather than a process. For example it is not true that the central apparatus was elevated to have "absolute control" of all party matters in 1921, this took several years of struggle and involved smashing several oppositions. It was only finalised in 1928 at the Fifteenth Party Congress when the oppositions, Zinovievite, Trotskyist and Democratic Centralist, were expelled and driven underground.

Indeed Mark has to overemphasise the impact of the ban on factions in 1921 to bolster his argument - yes factions were banned but groupings and platforms weren't. Indeed when Riazanov moved a (defeated) amendment at the tenth congress proposing a ban on groupings standing for the Central Committee (CC) on the basis of platforms, Lenin opposed it saying:

"We cannot deprive the party and the members of the

CC of the right to turn to the party, if a basic question provokes dissension... We haven't the power to suppress this."<sup>4</sup>

Indeed even after the ban, which was probably conceived of as temporary, the WO and the DCs carried on much as before. Certainly some administrative measures were taken against individuals, something not uncommon since 1919, but Lenin also sought to encompass some of the WO criticisms. He ensured that two members of the WO were taken onto the CC and joined with them in pushing through a purge of careerist and petit bourgeois elements which had joined the Russian Communist Party since the revolution, something the WO had demanded - 200,000 party members were removed in 1921. None of this suggests a "monolithic party" was established in 1921, or that a counter-revolutionary coup had been carried out.

If we want a more accurate analogy with the French Revolution, the crisis of 1921 was more like the autumn of 1793 when the Jacobins struck against the left and the popular movement, weakening themselves and paving the way for a later Thermidorian triumph. Trotsky later saw the banning of factions in this way:

"It is possible to regard the decision of the Tenth Congress as a grave necessity. But in the light of later events, one thing is absolutely clear: the banning of factions brought the heroic history of Bolshevism to an end and made way for its bureaucratic degeneration."<sup>5</sup>

Mark, I think, confuses the beginning of a process with its end point.

## Lenin as a counter-revolutionary?

It is much more fundamentally wrong to suggest that Thermidor was "led by Lenin", that Lenin, using the analogy with France, led a counter-revolution to crush the workers' movement in 1921. None of the leaders of the Bolsheviks were "perfect" in the 1921 crisis - all of them

**It is fundamentally wrong to suggest that Thermidor was "led by Lenin", that Lenin, using the analogy with France, led a counter-revolution**

made mistakes and the banning of factions was a very big one. But is it in any sense true that Lenin and Trotsky set out to destroy the power of workers to control the revolution? Because this was the conscious policy of the Thermidorians - of Carnot/Barras, and it became the policy of the Stalin/Molotov group.

Looking at Lenin's policy and actions in the 1920-23 period disproves Mark's thesis. Lenin is clearly deeply frustrated with the party by 1920; he even refers to it as "sick" at one point, down with "a fever". He sees the trade union debate of 1920-21 as largely irrelevant to the problems facing the workers' state, which he believes has gone backwards since 1919. He sees the real problems as

the disastrous economic situation leading to a political crisis, the disintegration of the working class and the growing bureaucratisation of party and state.<sup>6</sup>

By 1920 the economy was in a state of collapse, the peasants were in revolt against the government and the grain conscriptions, the civil war was not over, the working class had become “déclassé” in Lenin’s words and was exhausted. Hundreds of thousands of the most militant had gone to the front, huge numbers with links to the land had returned to the villages to survive, while the remainder struggled to keep the factories going and ensure their own survival, often through producing their own products for barter.<sup>7</sup>

The state apparatus had swollen with hundreds of thousands seeking work where none existed outside of it – yet this apparatus was incompetent, bureaucratic and led by the nose by former bourgeois and Tsarist bureaucrats. This was the crisis that came to a head in early 1921.

To tackle the growing economic crisis Lenin puts forward the Tax in Kind and the New Economic Policy (NEP) which was adopted and developed from the tenth congress.<sup>8</sup> Faced with the growing bureaucratisation he thrashes around looking for answers; he thinks about separating the party from the state, agrees to a purge of party careerists and bureaucrats in 1921 and proposes the Rabkrin, the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection. The idea of this body was to bring in workers and poor peasants to control and purge the bureaucracy.

None of these anti-bureaucratic measures worked, as Lenin increasingly realised in the final year of his active political life. The depth of the party’s degeneration, and Stalin’s role in it, is brought home to him in his struggle to defend the leadership of the Georgian Communist Party against bureaucratic repression by Stalin and Ordzhonikidze.<sup>9</sup> He proposes a series of reforms to the party structure aimed at reducing the power of the Secretariat – expanding the size of the CC, combining the

### Factions and democracy

Mark’s main “evidence” for Lenin as Thermidorian is his proposal to ban factions, his invective against the WO and DC, and the administrative measures taken against them and the Workers’ Group of Miasnikov. Yet even here a one-sided picture is presented. Invective and exaggerated polemic was common in the Bolshevik party (isn’t it on the British far left?). Lenin aimed as much invective at Bukharin in the trade union debate – calling him a “syndicalist” and accusing him of “a break from communism”. This was all par for the course. In Lenin’s case it reflected his frustration with the debate and his fear that it would split the party in a period of crisis.

The banning of factions, (defined as “groups with separate platforms, striving to a certain degree to segregate and create their own group discipline”)<sup>10</sup> bad as it was, did not involve banning groupings or organised discussion in the party. At various points in 1921 Lenin praised the leaders of the WO, nominated them for the CC, invited them to help the party combat bureaucracy and draw more workers into party/state activity. His annoyance was that they failed to put forward practical proposals and continued what he saw as their “empty opposition”.<sup>11</sup>

Again, to maintain the idea that Thermidor took place in 1921 rather than later, Mark has to exaggerate and bring forward chronologically the degree of administrative and police measures taken against oppositionists within the party. He refers to “the demonising and destruction through a system of expulsion and internal exile of the left Bolsheviks, the Workers Opposition and the Democratic Centralists in 1921 and then in 1923 through the direct intervention of the GPU . . . into party political disputes with the police attack on Miasnikov’s Workers Group”.<sup>12</sup>

Certainly “re-allocating” comrades to party duties away from their political bases was used to disrupt opposition – it was complained about as early as the ninth congress in 1920. But it was often temporary – it happened to Tomsky when he fell out with the CC over the trade union question for example. This was not the same as the internal exile used in 1927-28, and Mark is confusing the two.

It should also be remembered that the WO platform was not only printed in Pravda, but 250,000 copies were printed in 1921 as a special pamphlet. It was circulated at the Third Congress of the Communist International (CI) where the WO put their arguments. Further in 1922 the WO put forward the “Appeal of the 22” to a Comintern conference that was discussing the united front, appealing to the Comintern to intervene because the Russian party was ignoring the decisions of party congresses on workers’ democracy – a commission was set up to discuss the charges. At the eleventh congress of the Russian Communist Party (RCP) in 1922, a commission was set up to investigate the continued activities of the WO and the leaders were threatened with expulsion if they continued their oppositional activities, but again they were not expelled.

Miasnikov (not a member of the WO), who was campaigning in the city of Perm for a free press, was expelled because he refused to follow party discipline, despite a

**None of this suggests a leader who is trying to prevent the workers from driving the revolution forward, an agent of the Thermidorian bureaucracy**

Rabkrin with the Central Control Commission and making it directly responsible to the Congress.

Lenin saw the purpose of this body as reforming the state apparatus and rooting out bureaucracy, as well as training workers in running the state. In December 1922 he suggests to Trotsky that they should form a “bloc against bureaucracy” and calls on the party to find a way of removing Stalin as General Secretary in addition to his “Testament” in January 1923.

None of this suggests a leader who is trying to prevent the workers from driving the revolution forward, an agent of the bureaucracy, a counter-revolutionary Thermidorian.

personal appeal from Lenin. He went on to organise an underground group outside the party, which presumably led to the "police action" that Mark refers to. The Russian historian Robert V Daniels makes the point that "This was the only incident after the Bolsheviks became a party in which Lenin actually expelled a prominent member."<sup>13</sup>

## France and Russia: the contrasts

This might have been a difficult period for the left in the RCP to organise but it was not a period of Thermidorian counter-revolution. By contrast in the months after French Thermidor the sans-culottes were being terrorised and attacked by the royalist jeunesse dorée with the encouragement of the government. In just one incident the Jacobin Club meeting in Paris was stormed, the men bludgeoned senseless and the women horsewhipped.

In Russia, even after the banning of factions in 1921, debate within the party continued unabated. Isaac Deutscher describes the eleventh congress where Trotsky and Lenin found themselves attacked from all sides over NEP and not just by the WO.<sup>14</sup> By the autumn of 1923 a formal platform was declared to fight for a new course, the "Platform of the 46".

Another contrast with the French Thermidor is in the economic arena. After Thermidor in France the economic situation of the sans-culottes deteriorated markedly as the counter-revolution attacked the limits that had been placed on prices for staples such as bread and flour. In Russia after 1921 it was the opposite. With NEP the conditions of the workers improved as food supplies increased and industry revived. Kevin Murphy's detailed study of a Moscow metal factory shows that strikes in the early period of NEP were offensive struggles for better wages, but by 1928 "the regime embarked on a programme of draconian wage cuts to help pay for the rapid industrialisation of the First Five Year Plan."<sup>15</sup>

One would expect that a counter-revolution would be accompanied by attacks on working class living standards and this happened in the late 1920's not in 1921. It is not surprising therefore that both the DC's, and the Trotskyist opposition, dated Thermidor from the later 1920s.

None of this is to underplay the importance of the mistakes of 1921 in banning factions, strengthening the party apparatus (control commission, secretariat, orgbureau etc) – the importance of these mistakes is of course clearer with hindsight. Of equal importance was the decision to outlaw all other political parties in 1921.

Up until this time, the Mensheviks, SRs, Left-SR's were suppressed and restricted episodically, i.e. when they actively sought to overthrow the government or carry out terroristic acts. In 1920 for example the Mensheviks played an active role in the trade union debate inside the Congress of Trade Unions, criticising Trotsky's position on the militarisation of labour and arguing for something similar to NEP.<sup>16</sup>

From 1921 other parties were banned completely. This meant there was no criticism of RCP policy coming from outside the party, in the soviets and trade unions. Thus freedom of criticism and organisation became more not less important inside the party.

But after 1921, opposition platforms could really only be guaranteed a hearing if they reflected divisions in the leadership of the party, on the CC or Politburo – these restrictions deprived the rank and file of the party of the ability to organise to correct the mistakes of the leaders. And even when the arguments came from the CC, as with the 1923 opposition, the Stalinists tried to keep them out of the party. Debates were only extended to the party because of economic crises and because of the popular feeling amongst the rank and file members.

## Tactical and programmatic implications

Mark does not clearly draw out any practical implications for revolutionary tactics by moving the date of Thermidor back to 1921. But they should be clear – Trotsky was open about them in his debates with the DCs who thought Thermidor had taken place by 1926 – it would have meant being in favour of a new party and a new (political) revolution. Trotsky dates the start of Thermidor from 1924, the defeat of the Left Opposition, but he sees Thermidor as a counter-revolution by instalments, with 1928 being the end point. As Mark points out, Trotsky still put off the call for a new party until 1933.

Mark criticises Trotsky for having a reform perspective right up till 1928, "Instead of espousing an open and militant struggle against Stalin, including through the building of new mass organisations, Trotsky limited his strategy to reform."<sup>17</sup> To be accurate Trotsky, for all his weaknesses in the struggle between 1923-28, did launch a militant struggle against Stalin but he did not call for a new party.

Was this because he was "hamstrung" by his illusions that the Stalinist centre, the party core, would come over to the left in the struggle against kulak counter-revolution? This was only part of the reason and I think Mark leaves out an equally important but related reason.

## None of this is to underplay the importance of the mistakes of 1921 in banning faction and strengthening the party apparatus

This relates to when you abandon a revolutionary party like the Bolsheviks/RCP. At whatever point a revolutionary opposition had decided to do this it would have had to operate semi-legally and would have cut itself off from a party with hundreds of thousands of members. Remember the soviets had shrivelled, other socialist parties were illegal, the GPU was a growing and powerful force, and the working class itself was weak. In this situation it is not clear what Mark means by building "new mass organisations" – new soviets, new trade unions, a new party? On the other hand the RCP was wracked with crises, the Platform of the 46 gained a sympathetic hearing and Stalin had to retreat and adopt the New Course. The split in

the Triumvirate (Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin) in 1925, created another opportunity. 1926 saw the United Opposition formed and despite the vacillations and capitulations of the Zinovievites, the opposition recruited hundreds, if not thousands, of new adherents in 1926-27.

Trotsky describes this process in *My Life*: "The backbone of the opposition was a group of old revolutionaries. But we were no longer alone. Hundreds and thousands of revolutionaries of the new generation were grouped

## Had the left abandoned the party in 1921 under a false perspective of Thermidor having occurred it would have made a serious mistake

about us."<sup>18</sup> He goes on to recount how upwards of 20,000 militants attended "illegal" meetings of the opposition in Leningrad and Moscow in 1927. One meeting in a Technical High school had 2,000 with hundreds more overflowing into the streets. Only after Stalin ordered the GPU to physically break up these meetings under the guise of groups of "outraged workers" were such meetings suspended. These meetings were followed by open opposition demonstrations in October 1927 on the tenth anniversary of the revolution.

Had the left abandoned the party in 1921 under a false perspective of Thermidor having occurred it would have made a serious mistake. Thermidor took place between 1924-28 and this was surely a time to struggle in the RCP to rally the cadres for a new party, because by 1928 the struggle for workers' power could only have been conducted by force, against the RCP leadership and its GPU apparatus. Trotsky did not have this perspective, which was a grave error, but in any case the historical cards were stacked against a positive outcome. The defeat of the Chinese revolution in 1927, as Trotsky said, both shocked the party into political life in the short term, but confirmed the defeatist trends of Socialism in One Country in the long term.

### Trotskyism's "fatal flaw" ↗

There is another theme in the article that is unconvincing – that the sectarian practices and bureaucratic centralism that infect today's Trotskyist movement can be traced back to "Thermidor" in 1921. As Mark puts it Trotskyism's "fundamental notion of party organisation incorporates the Thermidorian inheritance of 1921".

We know that in retrospect Trotsky argued that the banning of factions was a mistake and that he defended the right of factions to exist in the Fourth International.<sup>19</sup> In *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky goes further, linking the ban on factions to the ban on other parties:

"The prohibition of oppositional parties brought after it the prohibition of factions. The prohibition of factions ended in a prohibition to think otherwise than the infal-

lible leaders. The police manufactured monolithism of the party resulted in a bureaucratic impunity which has become the source of all kinds of wantonness and corruption."<sup>20</sup>

Mark's article gives a different view of Trotsky on this question and perhaps a one-sided one. He quotes Trotsky from 1924 apparently defending the ban on factions.<sup>21</sup> Yet surely it is highly relevant that Trotsky is defending himself in front of the thirteenth congress, packed with Stalinist and Zinovievite apparatchiks following a long and vituperative campaign against "Trotskyism" and after his opposition is clearly defeated in the party. He was having to make serious compromises, such as denouncing his international co-thinkers, to avoid expulsion.

Maybe he was wrong to compromise, but we cannot take these positions as freely given. And if you read the rest of the speech Trotsky clearly places the blame for the formation of factions and factional struggle on the bureaucratisation of the party, which turns episodic disagreements into something more lasting.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps we should remind ourselves that factions are not a positive thing in a revolutionary organisation – they are "a necessary evil". Episodic groupings, tendencies, platforms and resolutions for conferences are the sign of a healthy organisation – the facilitators of healthy debate and argument, not semi-permanent factions with their own discipline.

Workers Power/LRCI went many decades without a serious faction fight but had many fruitful and serious political discussions, groupings and differences. When it did have a serious faction fight it split in half! Factions, especially in small organisations, often do presage a split because they are formed in order to conduct a serious fight to change a leadership and the direction of a party or group. Lenin was very conscious of this, which might explain his hostility to the WO in the crisis of 1921.

### Lenin and Trotsky's errors

It is not a "Thermidorian inheritance" that is the problem but rather a failure to get to the root of the errors between 1918 and 1923 of even two of the greatest revolutionaries – Lenin and Trotsky.

Although Trotsky made some self-criticisms over the banning of factions and other socialist parties he never made a fundamental critique of why these mistakes happened beyond the "they were emergency measures forced upon us, they were meant to be only temporary" type of explanation.

This might be true and we might even say, "in that situation, at that time we would have done no other". But we, and Trotsky in the 1930s, have historical hindsight – we know where those mistakes led, we know we need to learn the lessons in order not to repeat them in future revolutions. Many of these "exceptional circumstances" – civil war, armed intervention, international blockades – will face every socialist revolution that takes place, assuming there will never be a simultaneous international world revolution. How socialists deal with them, and the lessons we draw from the experience of the Russian Revolution, are vitally important questions for revolutionaries today.

There is no doubt that during the period between 1918 and 1923 both Lenin and Trotsky adopted erroneous positions with regard to the importance of multi-party democracy under socialism and to the functioning of a vanguard party. Trotsky never developed a thoroughgoing self-criticism on this question, leaving an ambiguous political legacy to Trotskyism. Both Lenin and Trotsky, during this period, believed it was possible to build the basis of socialism without multi-party soviets, and even to restrict democracy in the party itself, as long as the upper reaches of the vanguard party remained committed to the socialist goal.

The ban on other parties that started as a temporary war-time measure was extended and justified for a whole period in the construction of socialism – with the introduction of NEP only the justification changed. Now with the reintroduction of the market and a degree of capitalism it became even more important to prevent the development of opposition parties that the NEP-men and kulaks would use as a vehicle to support their capitalist interests. Lenin was quite explicit:

"Without capitalism, the peasantry can neither live nor produce, but it can do so, we believe without hearing the propaganda of the Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks. . . We promise neither freedom nor democracy."<sup>23</sup>

Trotsky, who at the time of Kronstadt had justified the banning of opposition parties as part of an emergency, now justified the RCP's political monopoly by its international isolation. Writing in Pravda a year after Kronstadt and describing the economic upturn, he asks whether it is time to end the single party system. He answers with a resounding No! As long as Russia was a "besieged fortress" no opposition, not even a feeble one, could be tolerated.<sup>24</sup>

The problem that the Bolsheviks/RCP faced was that at various points between 1918 and 1921 had there been free elections to the Soviets, and had other parties been allowed the freedom to organise, the Bolsheviks would have found themselves a minority party in the workers' state. The Kronstadt revolt was a symptom of this awkward fact. Trotsky's justification for the party's maintenance of its political monopoly was that it represented the proletariat whatever that class's "passing moods".

"The Workers Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans. They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers' right to elect representatives above the party, as it were, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy . . . it is necessary to create among us the awareness of the historical birthright of the party."<sup>25</sup>

A strength of the revolutionary party in the period of struggle for power, its ability to resist transient moods within the working class, be they adventurist or conservative, was turned into its opposite during the period of attempted socialist construction. The party, in fact a few thousand members of its "Old Guard" by 1921, had substituted itself for the proletariat, declaring that it alone embodied the proletariat's historic mission.

It is no great leap to see the connection between this

approach to other workers' and peasant's parties in the early 1920s and the way the far left groupings today view each other. Not as allies in the struggle for socialism, with different points of view, tactics and strategies, but as "enemies" and competitors who need to be isolated and manoeuvred against.

Trotsky's failure to fully address this problem of socialist democracy and the errors of the RCP in trying to provide a political framework for the transition from

## A strength of the revolutionary party in the period of struggle for power, its ability to resist transient moods within the working class

capitalism to socialism greatly weakened the Trotskyist movement and left it prone to both sectarianism and substitutionism.<sup>26</sup>

### The narrowness of the Fourth International

Mark's article also mentions the objective circumstances in which the Trotskyists found themselves after their expulsion from the Comintern. The International Left Opposition (ILO), Movement for a Fourth International and Fourth International were built in an era of mighty struggles but also one of deep defeats – the British General Strike, the Chinese defeat of 1927, the victory of fascism in Germany, the defeat in the Spanish Civil War, World War Two – to mention only a few. The Trotskyist movement was founded on an optimistic perspective – of rapidly building a new International and becoming the leadership of millions.

Even before World War Two this perspective did not fit with reality. Small groups and parties that stick with wrong perspectives easily fall into bureaucratism, leaderships become intolerant of criticism. Failure becomes the fault of the oppositionists, even the members. The democratic aspect of centralism is increasingly dispensed with, as feedback from the struggle does not fit the perspective. It is no doubt also true that some of the methods of the degenerate Comintern were carried over into the Fourth International – Cannon certainly knew how to fight and organise in a Zinovievite fashion.

But to what extent is the "narrow" approach to the group/party and the international also a contributing factor to a sectarian approach on the far left? The Third International was built on the Bolshevik model – politically homogenous, tightly organised, built for combat and seizing power. This related to the period, the "epoch of wars and revolutions", a period of the deep crisis for capitalism after the First World War. But is it appropriate to periods of capitalist stability?

Even by 1921 the Bolsheviks recognised the stabilisation of capitalism, adopted the united front and took tentative

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steps to co-operate with the Second and "Two-and-Half" Internationals.

Trotsky's initial Block of Four tactic also recognised the need to attract broader forces than just the ILO. But the period of the 1930s with its revolutionary situations, civil wars and crises appeared to reassert the need for a narrow, tightly knit international tendency – the programmatic "sharp axe" was emphasised over a broader political formation.

This approach, along with Trotsky's overwhelming political dominance in terms of experience and theoretical ability, undoubtedly accentuated many of the problematic trends that flow from such a "narrow" party perspective – sharp division with opponents, hostile polemics, politi-

cal intolerance and not a little arrogance – all qualities, that in small groupings isolated from the working class, tend in the direction of bureaucratism, cult-like leadership and undemocratic practices.

The experience of the Russian Revolution and the Communist International, the degeneration of the party in Russia and internationally should have led to a root and branch re-think of revolutionary strategy for the Trotskyists.

Instead what happened, was an attempt to return to the Bolshevik methods of 1905-19, to replicate the party and the international only on a miniature scale. If the Trotskyists didn't address this question in the 1930s (and they certainly didn't after World War Two) then we urgently need to address the question today.

## ENDNOTES

1. Useful accounts of these events can be found in Albert Soboul's, *A Short History of the French Revolution 1789-1799*, University of California 1977, Chap 2, and Daniel Guerin's, *Class Struggle in the First French Republic*, Pluto Press, 1977 , Chaps 11, 12.
2. Trotsky, "The Workers State, Thermidor and Bonapartism", *Writings 1934/35*, Pathfinder, 1971, p172 and p174.
3. On the question of Kronstadt, it is worth noting that all sections of the party, the Workers Opposition included, condemned the Kronstadt revolt. Indeed WO delegates joined the 300 delegates who left the Tenth Congress to lead the assault on the fortress. So in this sense Mark would have to include the WO and the DC's as Thermidorians as well! See R.V Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia*, Simon and Schuster, 1969, p 145
4. Daniels, op cit, p 150
5. Trotsky, "Factions and the Fourth International", *Writings 1935-36*, Pathfinder, 1977 p184
6. An analysis of Lenin's struggles and strategy in the years 1921-23 deserves an article in itself. Useful starting points are: M Liebman, *Leninism Under Lenin*, Merlin, 1980, p318-325; N Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, Vol. 2, MacMillan 1981, Ch 15; and Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, Wildwood House 1969.
7. For a detailed account of the situation of working class of Moscow in this period that argues against the notion of the complete disintegration of the proletariat see Simon Pirani, *The Russian revolution in Retreat, 1920-24*, Routledge, 2009.
8. When Mark says the NEP was introduced from above and "not even subject to party or soviet vote" this is only true if you try and separate the resolution on the Tax in Kind adopted at the tenth congress from NEP. This is non-sensical as the Tax in Kind was the initial form of NEP that was welcomed by all sections of the party, apart from the WO, because "war communism" by 1921 was clearly a disastrous policy.
9. See Lewin, op cit, Chaps 4 and 5.
10. Liebman, p302
11. It is worth noting that when Lenin tried to remove Shlyapnikov (the WO principal leader) from the CC in autumn 1921 for accusing the party's economic policy (NEP) of being "anti-worker" and the leadership of being animated by "bureaucratic and bourgeois hostility towards the masses" he failed to muster the two-thirds majority necessary on the CC. So much for the monolithic party!
12. "Red Jacobins", PR17, p38
13. R.V. Daniels p160. Despite this Daniels also puts forward the view that the Bolsheviks carried out their own Ninth Thermidor in 1921 – see Chap 7.
14. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky 1921-29*, OUP, 1959, p31.
15. Kevin Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: class struggle in a Moscow metal factory*, Haymarket, 2005, p82.
16. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879-1921*, OUP 1954, p500.
17. "Red Jacobins", op cit, p34
18. Trotsky, *My Life*, Thornton Butterworth, 1930, Ch 52 The last period of struggle within the party, p452.
19. Trotsky, Factions and the Fourth International, op cit, p184
20. Trotsky, *Revolution Betrayed*, Pathfinder, 1972, p104-105.
21. Red Jacobins, PR 17 p35
22. Trotsky, *Challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25*, Pathfinder, 1975, p 155 (the footnote 13 in PR17 gives the wrong page numbers for the quote, it should be p153-154).
23. Lenin quoted in Levine, op cit, p41
24. Deutscher, op cit, p29.
25. Trotsky speech to the tenth congress, March 1921, quoted in Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed 1879-1921*, p508.
26. An even bigger "root and branch" problem not addressed by Trotskyism is the question of the abandonment by Lenin of the programme for the transition outlined in *State and Revolution* in 1917. Far from the dictatorship of the proletariat becoming a semi-state it became a dramatically centralised state machine bearing many of the hallmarks of its Tsarist predecessor.



# Hardie, class struggle and keeping the faith

**KEIR HARDIE: LABOUR'S GREATEST HERO?**

**Bob Holman**

**Lion / 2010 / £10.99**

THE STANDARD Marxist appraisal of Keir Hardie goes something like this. Although due respect must be paid to his pioneering role, Keir Hardie was ultimately a failure. The party he created was, up to the time of his death, a rickety contraption that remained predominantly Lib-Lab in its outlook. He failed to create a clearly socialist (still less a vanguard) party and made no decisive break with Labour's emerging right wing.

He rejected Marxism and failed to align himself with the revolutionary, internationalist wing of social democracy. His opposition to capitalism and war remained on an ethical plane, while as a parliamentarian he was weak, erratic and given to the odd unprincipled manoeuvre.

So far, so negative. This is the ninth biography of Keir Hardie to be published since his death in 1915, ranging from quite brief sketches to the large scale work by Caroline Benn. The fact that this latest addition to Hardieana is written by a Christian socialist member of the Labour Party will probably contribute to a collective sigh in some parts of the left.

For all that, Holman's book (with the exception of a rather laboured conclusion) is a useful overview of Hardie's life, views and struggles that brings some fresh insights to a well-trodden period of labour history.

You can't help thinking that Keir Hardie has been ill served both by his supporters and his detractors alike. For decades, Labour's leaders would hail the name of Keir Hardie to rally conference behind policies that he would have denounced.

Marxists from Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation onwards tended to hold a slightly patronising attitude towards this self-taught worker with his gruff speech and scruffy clothes, who lacked their advanced theoretical insights. He was, they concluded, more of a throwback to the nineteenth century than the herald of the twentieth.

Hardie had to overcome enormous obstacles early in life. Born, as they used to say, out of wedlock, he was raised in dire poverty by his mother and stepfather along with eight half brothers and sisters, initially in a one room dwelling in the Lanarkshire coalfield. He started work at eight years old. At 12 he was working with pit ponies, and was trapped underground in a colliery accident.

From an early age Hardie

reasons. Yet it is crucial to understanding his development, what motivated him, and also his drawn out breach with radical Liberalism. Hardie's Christianity was very much that of the sermon on the mount – fiercely egalitarian and not afraid to quarrel with church leaders of any denomination who upheld the status quo.

The choice that lay before British socialists in the 1890s was between three possible routes to construct a workers' party – a small Marxist propaganda group; a party based on the unity of the various socialist groups; or a mass party based on the trade unions which socialists would seek to guide and influence.

Hardie took the latter course, and in doing so he had the encouragement of Friedrich Engels and Eleanor Marx. Despite his theoretical weaknesses, they saw in the ILP and Hardie's activity a genuine movement on the rise, in contrast to the sectarian manoeuvrings of Hyndman's SDF. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that Holman makes several inaccurate remarks about the SDF and he does not appear to have referred to such standard

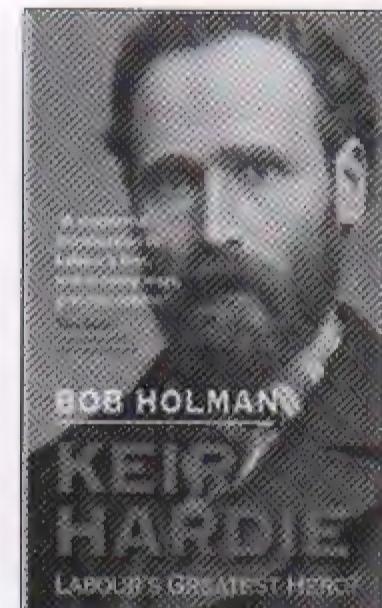
**The unions, dominated by Lib-Lab, were not going to be broken from Liberalism in the short term unless there was the prospect of real legislative advance**

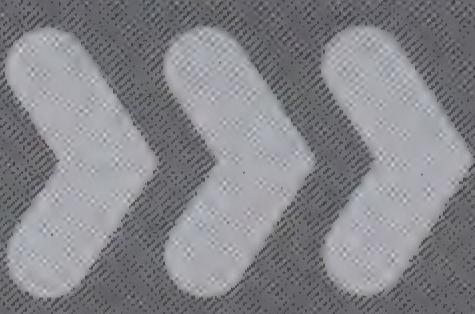
devoured books, which he read after a 12 hour working day, and was drawn to the temperance movement and evangelical Christianity – in contrast to his atheist parents who were influenced by the secularist Charles Bradlaugh.

Hardie's road to socialism was protracted, taking in activity as a trade unionist, union official, radical Liberal journalist and committed Christian. Holman persuasively makes the point that this latter aspect has been underplayed by previous biographers, probably for political

works as the biographies of William Morris, Eleanor Marx and H M Hyndman by E P Thompson, Yvonne Kapp and Chushichi Tsuzuki respectively.

Much has been made in the past about the inconsistency of Hardie's tactics towards Liberalism, and there is some truth in this. As against this, he faced two main problems. The first was that the unions, dominated by Lib-Lab and particularly the miners, were not going to be broken from Liberalism in the short term unless there was the prospect of real legislative advance. For the ILP, whose 28





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candidates failed to win a single seat in the 1895 general election, this was an uphill struggle.

However, it should be noted that its candidates averaged 1,500 votes per seat – a far higher average than the various left formations who have contested British elections

industry played in destroying both the environment and workers' health (p107). In the Mid Lanark byelection of 1887 he called for both Irish and Scottish home rule. He opposed the Boer War and attacked the role of British imperialism in India.

### **He was a staunch republican and advocated the abolition of the House of Lords as early as 1884. He advocated women's suffrage in the early 1880s**

over the last 14 years have achieved and with a much smaller population and franchise. Even so, the ILP leaders made no attempt to spin their results as a success. The real impetus for the unions to support a broad electoral project only came when their very functioning was threatened by the Taff Vale case.

The second problem was that, partly in response to the emergence of organised labour, the Liberal Party entered the twentieth century with an increasingly state-interventionist and reformist programme that made the task of breaking the unions from it all the more difficult.

So much writing about Hardie has centred on this relationship and break with Liberalism – and necessarily so. Holman's biography has the merit that it allows us to construct a version of Hardie that is much more contemporary than his cloth (in reality more of a deerstalker) cap.

He was a staunch republican (p79 and p119) and advocated the abolition of the House of Lords as early as 1884. He advocated women's suffrage in the early 1880s (p33), long before the suffragette movement. He called for free school meals, and in spite of his religious views, supported secular education (p126). In 1905 he campaigned against the Aliens Bill, which aimed to exclude Jews fleeing pogroms in eastern Europe (p123).

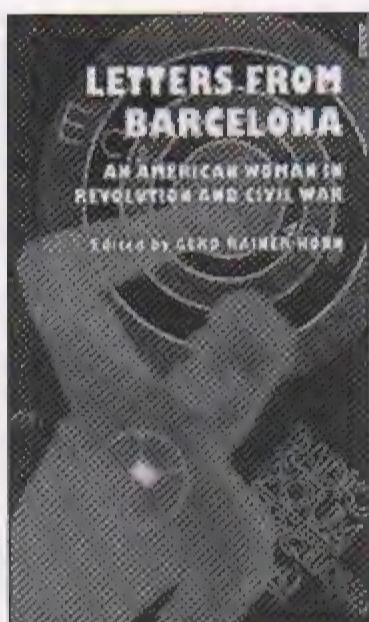
He exposed the role capitalist

During the great wave of militancy before the First World War, he publicly defended syndicalism and, while the TUC was cold shoulder to the Irish TGWU, rushed to support James Larkin and the Dublin transport workers. Among his close friends were Sylvia Pankhurst and George Lansbury, both very much on the left of the movement.

Hardie had enormous resilience. His son in law Emrys Hughes (who was sympathetic to Trotsky) wrote: "To stand alone as Keir Hardie did in the House of Commons, scoffed at, shouted down, and to continue on undaunted and uncorrupted, demanded great strength of character and supreme courage." (p188). He was personally incorruptible and on several occasions refused large sums of money to campaign for specific (and non-socialist) causes.

During the Boer War he faced down jingoistic mobs. In 1910 he spoke at the Second International in favour of a general strike to prevent war and, failing health notwithstanding, campaigned against the First World War, despite being in a minority in the Parliamentary Labour Party. For all that he wasn't (and never pretended to be) a Marxist, Holman's book reminds us that there was a lot more to Hardie than being the founding father of a reformist party.

Richard Price



### **Honeymoon on the Barcelona barricades**

**LETTERS FROM BARCELONA  
AN AMERICAN WOMAN IN REVOLUTION AND CIVIL WAR**  
Edited by Gerd-Rainer Horn  
Palgrave Macmillan / 2009 / £47.50

THIS BOOK might usefully serve the purpose of an introduction to the Spanish Civil War and Catalan Revolution. If you know a lot about the history of Spain in this period you might not learn anything new, but that would be to miss the point.

This book is the story of a political journey taken during one year of a living revolution. It is told, through the letters written to her family, by a 19 year old newlywed American woman, Lois Orr. She and her husband Charles chose to divert

their honeymoon from Germany to revolutionary Spain and arrived in Barcelona in the late summer of 1936. Her letters tell not only of her views on the changing political situation and events in the revolution but also bring into stark contrast just how much ordinary, mundane and everyday life continued alongside it.

Both Lois and Charles had been active in the American Socialist Party before departing the US for their European hitch-hiking honeymoon, and had hoped to reach India. The outbreak of the civil war in Spain interrupted their plans and shortly after arriving in Barcelona they had acquired press cards and were working for the English press and radio department

of the POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification).

Lois's early letters are full of excitement, enthusiasm and revolutionary optimism and almost read like holiday postcards but with a political backdrop. In September 1936 she writes "I'm having the time of my life here – the people, of course, are the cream of the intellectual crop of Germany, and the French and English comrades are all intensely interesting." This reveals the circles in which the couple were mixing, almost exclusively those of foreign revolutionaries.

They never learned Catalan despite being accomplished linguists. Their interest in the local Catalan people was more as a journalistic study of how to conduct and defend a revolution. Nevertheless in the first months after the revolution Lois talks about industry being organised on a socialist basis, the formation of anti-fascist committees, the abolition of clerical schools, free food, free rooms and free cables. She remarks "It really is a lot of fun being a revolutionary when your side is on top."

She is also keen to stress just how orderly, normal and safe Barcelona is, and continues to describe her everyday routines of diet, clothes, washing and problems with fleas. Yet her sense of political context always seems to take precedence "and we are right in the middle of making history", she tells her father after describing how they'd been enjoying themselves.

As early as October 1936 however, Lois is already aware that it may not be all fun and excitement. She expresses her reservations on the anarchist CNT (National Labour Confederation) and POUM's entry into the Generalitat as she calls it, or the joint workers' government of Catalonia. She comments that the Communist and Socialist Parties within it were trying to turn the war into a fight to save democracy, evidenced by the increasing suppression of some political slogans and ideas in particular "War on the front and revolution

behind the lines".

She points out that the soldiers were fighting for a social revolution, they are not having their "arms legs heads etc shot off" just for "some bourgeois republican govt. which would give right back to the capitalists, the factories, railroads,

and disbanded. Attempts are made to disarm the workers in general under the pretext of providing arms for the front. Lois's twentieth birthday passes with the main excitement being "that I took a laxative which didn't work".

She and Charles do now at least,

## In April 1937 Charles joins the POUM but Lois describes it as "bureaucratic ridden" and its leaders as "dirty cowards" frightened of being called Trotskyists

buildings that they have claimed as their own". She also begins to note the creeping bourgeoisieification of civic life in the clothes people are wearing, their terms of address, the return of some private property to the previous owners.

In November 1936 Lois moves jobs to the English propaganda section of the Generalitat. She refers to this as a proper bureaucracy and is disgusted by some of the articles she is required to translate. Her work no longer feels like revolutionary activism but more of a job as a means of subsistence, "it did make my blood boil to have to translate such junk... But then I'm getting 12 pesetas a day for it... which we can use very nicely for clothes, food etc.". She is still enjoying the intellectual and social life amongst the foreign revolutionaries, learning the theory and dialectics of revolution. Food shortages are becoming more apparent but shops and markets remain open, 75 new schools have been established, the women's secretariat "gives lessons in shooting, first aid, knits". Life goes on and the city remains a safe place to be.

Over the winter Lois notes the increasing Stalinist grip of the PSUC (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia) under the direction of the Soviet Union. She sees the Moscow trials as an indication of their intent to exterminate the POUM. The workers' police or "Patrols of Control" are disarmed

begin to involve themselves in the local Catalan politics and movements. In April 1937 Charles joins the POUM but Lois doesn't, describing it as "bureaucratic ridden" and its leaders as "dirty cowards" – they are frightened of being called Trotskyists. Lois is more interested in the development of what she calls a real Bolshevik Marxist party out of splits in the ranks of the POUM, CNT and deserters from the International Brigades. In late April 1937 Lois remains hopeful that the "revolution is still alive" and there is "still a chance of winning the war".

Both are actively involved in the fighting on the barricades during the May Days, which lifts their spirits tremendously, "It was a great experience to live even four days under workers' power". Lois writes that her faith in the instincts of the working class has gone up. They fought "quite spontaneously, not only without any leadership but actually against their leaders" who only attempted to double cross and betray them. Charles adds in one of his letters that "the fighting is evidently finished – but no one has won."

It soon however became clear to Lois who had won, with the arrival of 8,000 guards with Russian rifles on the streets of Barcelona. The POUM was driven underground. Many anarchists and others were arrested and imprisoned, "the counter revo. is on top" as Lois puts



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it. Later in the month however she still manages to talk of the tranquillity of the last weeks, with bullfights, appreciation of D H Lawrence, fairgrounds, book festivals, swimming and walking in the hills. The first bombardment of Barcelona in June 1937, and the foreigners leaving in great numbers shatters the tranquillity.

On 17 June 1937 Lois and Charles were arrested and held in a secret GPU prison for 10 days where Lois continued her political journey, discussing with her fellow inmates not only their common devotion to liberty and a hatred of Stalinism which had lead them all to their current circumstances but also their differences. She later said she "was the only one there who thought the workers should have

seized power during the May Days. The rest were for a POUM-CNT government in the Generalitat."

Lois and Charles were released largely due to the intervention of the US embassy and the fact that they held US passports. Tens of thousands weren't and were executed by the Stalinists. The couple returned to Paris and took up solidarity work for their comrades who remained in prison in Spain. And so ended what must be one of the most eventful and unconventional honeymoons in history. The outcome of the civil war and revolution in Spain was not what the Orr's would have wished for, but it must still have been so much better than a fortnight in the Seychelles.

John Cooke

which up to 190 Jews were murdered. In fact it only occurred after the coup against the British in April-May 1941 was put down. (pp99-102)

Nonetheless, the coup was never considered pro-Nazi so much as anti-British at the time. (pp90-91) The Iraqi communists, who never hesitated to condemn all manifestations of antisemitism, gave it their full support.

Leaving aside the specific reaction of the Arabs to the holocaust and Nazi persecution, however, it is true that antisemitism existed within Islam and it is amongst fundamentalist and/or reactionary pan-Islamists, from the 1880's onwards, that Achcar locates Arab antisemitism. (pp. 103-167).

Achcar details the record of four individuals in particular who, in their desire to see the end of Zionism, allied themselves with the Nazis, but it is doubtful whether even they ever subscribed to the Nazis' antisemitic doctrine of racial superiority.

Yet there are serious problems with the book, a work that has been received almost uncritically by the socialist left. Achcar is a supporter of the Fourth International. But instead of Marxism there is an eclectic mixture of third worldism and a naïve belief that if Palestinians adopt the bi-national solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict then peace is possible.

Filastin, consistently depicted Nazism as reactionary and dictatorial from 1933 onwards, displaying "an acute awareness, which can only be termed premonitory, that Hitler's accession to power would reinforce the Zionist enterprise." (p48)

Even the Zionist intelligence

## Zionist historiography and the holocaust

**ARABS AND THE HOLOCAUST  
THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR OF NARRATIVES**  
Gilbert Achcar  
Saqi / 2010 / £25

**Z**IONISM HAS long used the holocaust as a propaganda weapon against Arab nationalism and the most important aspect of Achcar's new book is his demonstration that the Zionist assertion that the Nazis' message was favourably received by the Arab masses was untrue.

For example, Achcar cites Israeli researcher, Israel Gershoni that "the overwhelming majority of Egyptian voices . . . rejected fascism and Nazis . . ." (pp42-43) Likewise he cites the Syrian independence movement as having defended the Jews of Syria against attack and the Palestinian daily Alif Ba, which condemned the August 1934 anti-Jewish riots in Algiers as well as the Nazi government in having driven out its Jews. (p45)

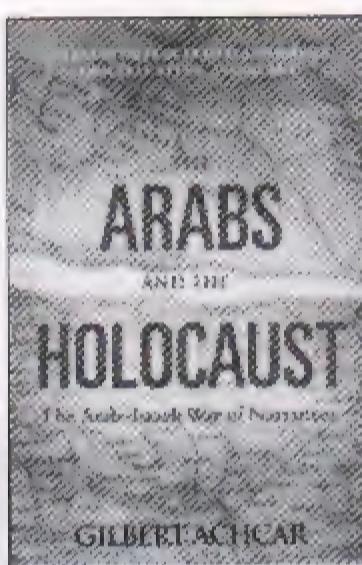
The main Palestinian daily,

**The question which Achcar avoids is why movements that look backwards to past millennia hold such sway? And why has a Reformation never taken hold in Islam?**

services, not noted for their impartiality, suggested that no more than 60% of the Palestinians supported the Nazis, which Achcar rightly suggests is remarkable given the political situation. (p51)

The major evidence of Arab antisemitism was the Farhud, the anti-Jewish pogrom in Baghdad in

All too often Achcar's explanations of ideological phenomenon such as Islamic fundamentalism are both circular and themselves located in ideological formulations. He writes that "Islamic fundamentalism, because of its attachment to the letter of the holy scriptures and its



desire to imitate early Islam . . . perceives religion as the prime mover of the world, as if humanity had never emerged from the middle ages." (p109) Of course, this is true of all religions, although strictly speaking the interpretation of the holy texts are mediated by ayatollahs, rabbis and priests.

The question which Achcar avoids is why, in the 21st century, movements that look backwards to past millennia hold such sway? And why has a Reformation never taken hold in Islam? It is surely the job of a Marxist historian, to provide a materialist understanding of history, not merely a description. And yet the answer is not hard to find. Zionism froze the development of the Jewish Reform movement. US colonialism and slavery invigorated Christian fundamentalism; and in the case of Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, imperialism's actions have pushed the most reactionary, backward and barbaric elements in Islam to the fore.

Instead Achcar puts forward a truism, namely that "Islamic fundamentalism has perceived the Palestinian conflict as a war of religion between Jews and Muslims . . . Whereas antisemites perceive Jews as members of a 'race' fundamentalists regard them as members of a faith." (p109) This of course was the difference between Christian and Nazi antisemitism. But Islamic fundamentalism is a phenomenon rooted amongst the oppressed, unlike its Christian counterpart.

In fact Islamic fundamentalism is a reflection of Zionism's use of the Jewish religion as a colonial badge. It is no accident that the 1929 riots in Palestine, when 133, mainly Orthodox anti-Zionist Jews were massacred in the four holy cities of Tiberias, Jerusalem, Safed and Hebron, arose from a trivial dispute over the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Its underlying roots, as the 1930 Hope Simpson Inquiry found, were the policies of dispossession of Arab peasants from "Jewish" land and Jewish Labour.

Moreover, Achcar seems determined to defer to Zionist sensibilities concerning any

comparison between their own movement and Nazism.

It is of course true that crass comparisons between the Nazi movement and Zionism serve no purpose. But Zionism was not simply a reaction, like the black muslim Louis Farrakhan or Marcus McGarvey before him, to racism. Nor was it the equivalent of the anti-white racism of the Pan

Zionism" to the Stalinist abuse of social democrats as "social fascist", (p56) Achcar demonstrates a superficial understanding of Zionism. This is a false analogy. Social democracy and fascism were entirely different creatures, the former originating as a movement to reform capitalism, the latter a counter-revolutionary movement whose aim is to preserve it.

## Most Jews joined the Bund or the Bolsheviks or liberals of one form or another. Zionism openly advertised itself as an anti-socialist movement

African Congress with its "one settler, one bullet" slogan. If it was, then it would indeed have been just another harmless, utopian movement. Its reaction to antisemitism was linked to its development of state power in Palestine.

Nor was Zionism "morally excusable as the reactive racism of blacks to white racism". Even in Europe it sought alliances, from the very start with the Jews' enemies, from the Czar of Russia's Ministers von Plehve and Count Witte to foremost French antisemite Eduard Drumont, editor of *La Libre Parole*. It was openly seen by most Jews as antisemitism in Jewish clothing. Zionism was the most reactionary response to antisemitism.

Most Jews joined the Bund or the Bolsheviks or liberals of one form or another. Zionism, which was a legal movement during the Czarist regime, openly advertised itself as an anti-socialist movement. When Zionists joined in the fight against antisemitism, they soon ceased to be Zionists.

But when Zionism achieved state power in Palestine and Israel it lost any of its reactive qualities and, on the contrary, became as bad as the worst antisemites in its attitude to the Arabs and non-Jews of Palestine.

But in comparing the use of the label "fascist" to describe the "socialist leaders" of "Socialist

Achcar's formulation that the comparison between Zionism and Nazism is understandable when coming from Palestinian or even Jewish anti-Zionists, but potentially antisemitic when coming from non-Jewish European, is false. Having personally moved boycott motions in the UNISON trade union conferences in 2008 and 2009, my experience is that trade unionists and most progressive people do indeed compare the treatment that Jews suffered in Nazis Germany with what the Palestinians today experience. This is in no way antisemitic and for Achcar to suggest that because Europeans are "citizens of countries that were actively or passively responsible for the Holocaust and who can, for that reason, be legitimately suspected of antisemitism" is nothing short of collective guilt and an expression of chauvinism. (p224) Collective national guilt is a reactionary concept.

Achcar concludes that Israel "owes its creation to the Holocaust . . ." (p19) There is no doubt that Hitlerism gave the "Jewish state" enormous help. In particular Hitler intervened decisively within internal debates in the NSDAP when for example the Foreign Office opposed Ha'avarah, the Transfer Agreement.\*

But it is a myth that the Zionists have been careful to foster to



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suggest that but for the Holocaust there would have been no Israeli state. The achievement of a critical Jewish mass would undoubtedly have taken longer. There certainly wouldn't have been the same

### Indeed the colonisation of Liberia by American blacks was exactly a question of those freed from the slave trade in turn becoming oppressors

ideological imperative nor would British imperialism have been so decisively weakened in the Middle East, one of the primary factors in its decision to "scuttle" in 1948. But there is also no reason to doubt that like the other white dominions the Jewish settlers would have achieved independence, probably around the mid-1950's.

The suggestion that "the tragic nature of the conflict" lies in the fact that Israel "created as a refuge for persecuted Jews" created the Palestinian refugee problem, lies at the heart of Achcar's apologetics. (p29)

As Ben-Gurion made clear, the purpose of the creation of a Jewish state was *not* to rescue Jews but to perpetuate a Jewish race/nation. This is the flaw that lies at the heart of Achcar's argument. It feeds into apologists for Zionism who talk of the conflict of two just causes.

Achcar describes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as "exceptional" (p31) because "no other population actively involved in a colonial-settler project was fleeing a form of persecution as long-standing and brutal as European antisemitism..."

Factually this is simply untrue as well as being irrelevant. The fact and degree of their persecution was no excuse for the treatment the Palestinians received and the conflict between settler and native inhabitant had nothing to do with antisemitism and everything to do with the expulsion of the peasants from the land.

Were the Pilgrim Fathers not fleeing religious persecution in

England when they set sail for Spain? Were the Australian convicts, including the Tolpuddle Martyrs, not fleeing oppression? Were those British workers who were resettled in South Africa from

claim to have been persecuted by British colonialism when they migrated inland from the 1830s onwards, bearing in mind that the first concentration camps housed Boers not Africans. Indeed the colonisation of Liberia by American blacks was exactly a question of those freed from the slave trade in turn becoming oppressors. Achcar's argument seems like special pleading.

**Tony Greenstein**

\* In response to a heckler, Hitler stated, "Let him [the Jew] look for his human rights where he belongs: in his own state of Palestine." Rosenberg, the chief theoretician on things Jewish and Zionism adopted the same approach. Black op cit p172-3.



the 1830's on not persecuted? And weren't Presbyterian settlers in Ireland also not fleeing persecution in Scotland? Even the Boer trekkers could legitimately

### A shallow account of the left and LGBT struggles

**THE RED IN THE RAINBOW, SEXUALITY, SOCIALISM AND LGBT LIBERATION**

**Hannah Dee**

**Bookmarks / 2010 / £7**

CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS, an equal age of consent, laws against discrimination at work and by businesses, Section 28 scrapped, new rights to claim asylum on the grounds of persecution regarding sexuality – some may question what is left for LGBT activists to fight for?

However, as PR goes to press rumour and speculation continues to haunt Con-Dem Coalition Foreign Secretary William Hague about his "improper" relationship with a special advisor, demonstrating that homophobia still has the potential to wreck careers, while homophobic bullying is rife many schools and violence against LGBT people still results in murder or serious injury on a fairly regular basis.

Meanwhile all the major religious groupings in Britain and elsewhere continue to wrangle

publicly over the issue, and ten countries still have the death penalty on their statute books simply for being gay.

Hannah Dee's new review of LGBT history, starts with the statement that "the link between LGBT struggle and wider social revolt runs through the history of our fight for sexual liberation like the red in the rainbow. Socialists and the working class movement have been central to that history."

Dee insists "it is time to renew this radical struggle for a sexual liberation where we are free to express who we are, and love who we want, without fear, legal persecution or commercial exploitation. It is time to rediscover the red in the rainbow."

Over the summer SWP meetings up and down the country promoted Dee's book. Given that a lively and insightful account of LBGT struggles placed within a class conscious and labour movement context would indeed be very welcome, it is particularly disappointing that this book is not it.

Dee documents all the key milestones of LGBT struggles: the Oscar Wilde trial, the first "movement" for gay rights (the German Scientific Humanitarian Committee launched in 1897), and

rainbow actually lets the left off the hook. She describes the "political confusion and divisions" (p100) that led to the demise of radical gay liberation in the mid-1970s and relates how the left at the time was

other groups on the left to stop overlooking the issues and pretending they were unimportant, and start supporting LGBT rights.

And even then, support for LGBT rights could not be taken for granted. At the founding conference of Respect, the SWP's electoral project that came out of the Stop the War movement in 2004, Lindsay German declared that LGBT rights could not be treated as a "shibboleth" if that meant Muslims would not back the new initiative. The Respect project is completely ignored in Dee's book. Even the SWP and the revolutionary party are not referred to once.

Dee does criticise "reformist organisations which subordinated principles [on LGBT rights] to winning elections" (p120) but when she does she is referring to the Labour Party under Kinnock in 1987, not the SWP's recent past.

While there is indeed a strong tradition of socialists fighting for LGBT liberation, covering up where we got it wrong does not help win LGBT activists to socialist ideas or to ensure that we get it right in the future.

Alison Higgins

## Dee fails to look at the history of her own organisation or others like it on the Trotskyist left, which she implies were totally unaffected by homophobia

the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution. More recently, she reminds us of the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969 and the Gay Liberation Front that followed, Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners in Britain during the strike of 1984-85, activists attempt to de-stigmatise and support people with HIV/AIDS, the battle against Section 28 (which outlawed local councils "promotion" of homosexuality), through to the reforms under New Labour.

But she tries to do too much in 170 small pages of large print. As a quick introduction to LGBT history for someone with little or no previous knowledge it just about works and, despite its promotion as the big new Bookmarks title, this must be what it was conceived to be – aimed at a student audience or newly organised workers, a beginners guide to... However, Dee tries to weave LGBT history into the history of the world working class in such a way that is not really feasible in a book of this size.

And not only is the book a quick whiz through history, glossing over all the complicated bits on its way – it is also essentially a digest of SWP writings on LBGT issues and the history of the working class as well – virtually every other footnote refers to Chris Harman's *A People's History of the World* or Colin Wilson on gay liberation and socialism or Lindsey German on women.

Dee's simplistic attempt to chart an unbroken thread of red in the

generally accepting of the "Stalinist bourgeois deviation" view of homosexuality.

As a result LGBT radicals failed to develop real links with socialist politics at the time. However, Dee fails to look at the history of her own organisation or others like it on the Trotskyist left, which she implies were totally unaffected by homophobia, Stalinist or otherwise. She fails to document how it was actually LGBT members within these groups, influenced by the non-socialist LGBT movement, that finally forced the SWP, Militant and

## How capitalists rose out of the ashes of the plan

### POLAND'S NEW CAPITALISM

Jane Hardy

Pluto / 2009 / £17.99

 POLAND'S NEW Capitalism is a critique of the Polish economy, the "poster boy" of neo-liberal capitalism, by Jane Hardy a Marxist academic from the state capitalist tradition.

Hardy has written extensively on the creation of Polish capitalism before and this book certainly benefits from her in-depth knowledge of the subject, personal contacts and interviews with participants from both sides of the class divide. She talks to both

workers and managers in the new capitalist industries created out of what she refers to as Poland's "soviet style" "command planned" economy after the restoration of capitalism in 1991.

Indeed Hardy's state capitalist heritage is barely referred to. She asserts without any evidence that "military competition" with the west meant that what she calls Poland's centrally planned economy was capitalist after World War Two, but this is not explained let alone proven.

In fact this theory is little more than an inconvenience as Hardy understands very well that the





introduction of commodity production and the law of value from the early 1990s destroyed the plan and created a "New Capitalism" in Poland. Her book is a very interesting examination of how the privatisation of state industry, destruction of social welfare provision and introduction of commodity production affected Polish society at every level, from the bottom to the top.

Hardy explains the role of Solidarity in both protesting against the Stalinist bureaucracy in the 1970s and 80s and then in helping the introduction of neo-liberal solutions to the crisis of central planning in the 1990s. She notes that the number of small-scale private enterprises grew from 100 in 1981 to 572,400 in 1988, as the plan collapsed towards capitalism. This was then replaced by a brutal neo-liberal privatisation programme in the 1990s.

Output in the socialised sector fell by 24% while employment in it fell by 14%, this was what she aptly describes as a "leap towards global capitalism". Unemployment rose from 0.05% in 1989 to 8.4%, in 1991, peaking at around 20% in 2003 before falling in the recent boom, as a result of the growth of the economy and emigration, to around 11% in 2008.

She attributes the crisis of the central plan under the Stalinists to the slowdown in growth and profits throughout the world capitalist economy from the 1970s on and cites Angus Maddison, the noted professor of economic history at the University of Groningen in her support. Yet Maddison is clear that there were no profits in the centrally planned economies – these were a fictional construct imputed by the CIA at a set rate of 12% for purposes of comparison only.

Hardy is nonetheless clear that after capitalist restoration in the 1990s there was the construction of a new ruling class and that the nomenklatura, the Stalinist bureaucrats, "were not simply able to transform themselves into a new capitalist class". She explains how the creation of this new class was

facilitated by US imperialism through aid projects, advisers, so called "Marriott Men" and foreign direct investment. Hardy analyses how Polish state-owned enterprises were taken over, restructured or replaced by multinational corporations like Volvo and Mercedes, who established low cost

people sorting through rubbish to sell and eat. She explains how the counter-reforms have particularly hit women, with the effective abolition of legal abortion resulting in hundreds of thousands of back street terminations every year and how there has been the development of Polish working class

### **She attributes the crisis of the central plan under the Stalinists to the slowdown in growth and profits throughout the world capitalist economy from the 1970s**

production facilities in Poland.

Hardy also details how the destruction of nursery facilities and welfare provision provided by former state-owned enterprises had a radical impact on the living standards of ordinary working people. She describes how some women viewed the 1970s as a type of golden age, with the plan growing strongly, rising living standards and welfare provision, and contrasts this with the present picture of well dressed working

resistance and protest movements.

Poland's New Capitalism is a thorough dissection of the creation of Polish capitalism out of the Stalinist command economy. Hardy's perceptive take on events and thorough grasp of the empirical material enable her to explain that transition in spite of her – in practice only nominal – state capitalist theoretical framework, and the book is all the better for it.

**Bill Jefferies**

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